THE PLAY OF TO-DAY

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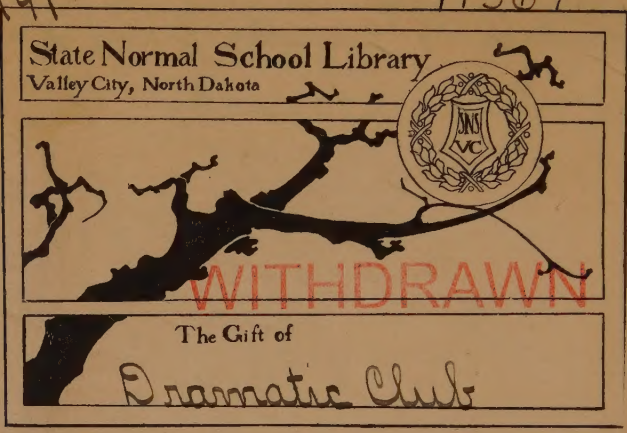

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THE PLAY OF TODAY

This timely work is endorsed by The Drama League of America, and is commended to its members as one of the most valuable among recent publications on the subject, and of especial interest to all students of the Drama.

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THE
PLAY OF TODAY

STUDIES IN PLAY-STRUCTURE
FOR
THE STUDENT AND THE THEATRE-GOER

BY
ELIZABETH R. HUNT

NEW YORK
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PREFACE

IN the hope of interesting those who recognize the æsthetic and social values of the acted drama, and are willing to be at reasonable pains to grasp its structure and methods of appeal, so that they may meet good plays halfway when they are presented in the theater, this book is offered to the public.

There are playgoers and playgoers. The best playgoer is he whose enjoyment is greatest. To give pleasure is the most logical reason for producing plays; to get pleasure, the most sensible reason for going to see them. Even the desire to "see something funny" is absolutely rational. The shock of hearty laughter is invigorating and refreshing. It stimulates the circulation and aids digestion. And since, in existing conditions, the usual time for our souls to have their adventures with dramatic masterpieces is the relaxed and digestive interval between dinner and the suburban trains, it is not unaccountable that the amusing play is popular.

It is unfortunate, however, not to enjoy anything but laughter in the theater. For even if the exhausted moderns who profess to care for nothing but fun could see farcical plays continually, they might grow as tired of them as of everything else. But good farce is always so rare as to limit the theatergoing of those who tolerate no other sort of play. Depending solely upon mirth for the restoration of our jaded faculties,

11567

we might all perish of fatigue in the course of one theatrical season.

Fortunately there is another kind of enjoyment in the theater which is as rational and beneficial, and ought to be well nigh as universal as the love of laughter. It is the delight which springs from the recognition of points well made, attention economized, and dramatic effects triumphantly brought off — the kind of delight which makes the spectator say to himself or to his neighbor, "Well done!" and perhaps applaud and cry "Bravo!"

This demands a certain receptivity and capacity for appreciation. But it is a mistaken notion that to be thus receptive is the exclusive privilege of the student of dramaturgics, or the professional critic, or the man of letters. The drama (we say it again and again) is the most democratic and whole-souled of the arts. The secrets of its power are not locked away from any one. A sound and sane unprofessional knowledge of the means used in good drama to create successful effects is not a matter of high culture or laborious scholarship. The underlying principles of play structure are based on common sense and human nature. Any mind capable of understanding how a house is built can grasp the fundamentals of how a play is made.

Among English speaking people, the greatest obstacle in the way of popular and widespread familiarity with the technique of the play is a certain lurking prejudice. Being of Anglo-Saxon blood, we are heirs and assigns to strange traditions about art. One of the most firmly intrenched of these traditions is that study of method tends to destroy enjoyment of effect.

Consciously or subconsciously we are fearful of knowing so much about dramatic technique that our enjoyment in the theater may lose its spontaneity. It is a curious apprehension. Reasoning backward from it, one would expect to find the English speaking audience habitually swept by whirlwinds of enthusiasm. In reality, we take our enjoyment of art in the theater, or elsewhere, rather stoically. Seldom is there any illusion to be dispelled by familiarity with method, or any other casualty. It is the Frenchman, with his minute knowledge of technical devices, who goes into temperamental ecstasies when he is pleased at the play.

The receptivity and appreciation of the theatergoing public is a matter of far-reaching importance. In the development of national drama, the direct and first-hand responsibility of the audience has been recognized at all times and in all lands. Without audiences there would be no plays. A lyrist may sing to disburden his soul; a Pictor Ignotus may paint for endless cloisters and eternal aisles; but the dramatist writes plays for the assembled contemporary audience. The theatergoing public crowds the background of his consciousness while he is working; and it follows, as the night the day, that the finer the appreciation he can count on, the better the quality of the drama he will turn out.

Thus the public, creating the only conditions under which plays can exist, and having power to keep acted plays to the level of its own intelligence and taste, is partaker in the drama, as in no other of the fine arts.

In the wake of the recent revival of dramatic literature, there are many indications that the public is

beginning to realize the delights and the obligations of its vital connection with the play of its own day. One indication is that theater audiences are organizing, so as to exert more effectual influence. The so-called Drama Leagues in this country have grown in a few years to vast proportions.

Leagues and clubs, however, are made up of individuals, each one of whom must do something for himself, if he is to become a creative spectator.

The place to study the drama is in the theater, and the way to study it is not to begin with rules (there are no rules), but to observe how the truly dramatic play is made.

Observation, however, is always and everywhere a rare accomplishment. If the present work is to any degree successful in opening the eyes and ears of drama students in the theater, and stimulating their observation so that their reading of plays in the class room or by the fireside may go on more prosperously, its purpose will be fulfilled.

The illustrations are drawn from the drama of recent years, and it has been thought desirable to comment extensively upon a few plays, rather than to make scattering references to many.

In preparing this volume, the author has slightly revised various articles which have appeared during the last four years in the Chicago *Record-Herald* and *Tribune*. An article on "Acting Scenery," recently published in *The Drama*, is also included, as well as several lectures delivered before Woman's Clubs in and about Chicago.

Grateful acknowledgment is tendered to the editors of the *Record-Herald*, the *Tribune* and *The Drama* for courteous permission to republish the articles which first appeared in their pages.

ELIZABETH R. HUNT,
Evanston, Illinois.

OCTOBER 22, 1912.

CONTENTS

		Page
I	DRAMA STUDY	17
	Drama and Literature	
	Preliminaries for Study	
	The Subtler Dramatic Qualities	
	Seeing a Play Twice	
II	THE EXPOSITION AND THE EXCITING FORCE .	26
	Illustrated by "The Servant in the House"	
	An Adequate Exposition	
	A Strange Exciting Force	
III	THE RISE OR GROWTH OF THE ACTION . .	34
	Illustrated by "El Gran Galeoto"	
IV	THE CLIMAX	41
	Illustrated by "Disraeli"	
V	THE FALL AND CLOSE OF THE ACTION . . .	52
	Variously Illustrated	
	Climax Further Considered	
	The Fall of the Action	
	The Close of the Play	
	The Foolish Old Ending	
VI	ANALYSIS OF "A DOLL'S HOUSE"	60
	To Illustrate all Technical Points Previously Mentioned	
	The "Story" of a "Doll's House"	
	The Use of the Material	
	Building the Play	
	The Subtler Devices	
	Greater Pleasure in Playgoing	

PAGE

VII THE CATASTROPHIC PLAY 73
Illustrated by Ibsen's "A Doll's House"
The Old Form and the New
The New "Drama of Catastrophe"
The Revolt from Earlier Forms
The Imitation of Earlier Forms
The Spread of the New Form
Two Common Dangers
Obscurity
Weakened Hold on Life
Cure for False Methods

VIII THE PLAY OF THE DAY 84
Illustrated by "The Earth"
The Play of the Day Illustrated
The "Story" of "The Earth"
What is a "Talky" Play?
Building the Play
The Inconclusive Ending
The Unhappy Ending
Turning Toward the Future

IX HIGH COMEDY OR COMEDY OF MANNERS . . 108
Illustrated by "Lady Windermere's Fan"
Comedy Defined
Comedy Illustrated
Good Dramatic Material
Comedic Use of the Material
The Setting
Building the Play
Comedy Well Exemplified
Molière the Model
La Bonne Comédie

X THE UNITIES IN THE MODERN PLAY . . . 141
Illustrated by "The Servant in the House"
The Human Interest
Unity in Simplicity

XI THE SOLILOQUY IN THE MODERN PLAY . . 146
The Indirect Vision
Popular Discussion

PAGE

XII REALISM IN THE MODERN PLAY 153
The Realist's Methods
The Romanticist's Methods
The Scope of Realism

XIII WHAT IS DRAMATIC LITERATURE? . . . 162
Illustrated by "The Admirable Crichton," and "What Every Woman Knows"

XIV THE PURPOSE PLAY AND ITS LIMITATIONS . 167
The Imitative Quality in Art
Zestful Interest in Art
Art is not Reformatory
The Moral Implication of Art

XV THE PIECED-OUT PLAY 173
Handling Dramatic Material
Brilliant Stage Conversation
Unsuccessful Imitation of Ibsen

XVI THE STATIC PLAY 180
What is a Dramatic Incident?
The Tedium of Life

XVII ACTING SCENERY 188
How it Helps the Play to Tell Its Story
The New Scenery
The Old Scenery
Difficult Transition from Old to New
What is "Acting Scenery"?
Corrective Influence of New Stage Craft

XVIII BRITISH ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH . 199
On and Off the Stage
The Actor's Responsibility
British Accent

XIX THE PLAY FOR CHILDREN 207
Illustrated by "Chantecler" and "The Piper"

THE PLAY OF THE DAY

I

DRAMA STUDY

"There is substantial agreement among enlightened leaders of public opinion in all civilized countries, that great drama, when fitly represented in the theater, offers the rank and file of a nation recreation which brings with it moral, intellectual and spiritual advantage."

SIDNEY LEE.

THE art of the playwright, old or new, past or present, should be studied in the same way and for the same reason as the art of the poet, the musician, the painter or the sculptor. The object and end of such study is increased enjoyment of the art — richer, fuller, more abundant and more spontaneous delight — nothing more nor less than that. Only the word "enjoyment," in its length, breadth and depth, connotes much that is significant.

Enjoyment of art at its best is not a merely passive matter, but active, taking toll of every faculty.

The term is here used in the sense of recreation — re-creation. That we all need. Moreover, we all know from occasional experience what it is to be re-created, that is, stimulated and inspired, by great drama, so that next day we return to our humble round and daily task with a sense of refreshment which makes everything a little lighter and easier than it was the day before — lighter and easier, because it is a joy to

think that there can be such a beautiful thing in all the world as a great play greatly acted.

The best service that art can render us is to call forth our appreciation, arouse our enthusiasm, and thus so restore us as to get us into better trim for our work in the world.

The American people has arrived at a stage of growth and development where it is in especial need of recreation. To illustrate: Nations are like individuals. This is a mere platitude. Now in the life of a young man who is firm on his own feet and making his unaided way in the world, there is apt to come a time when he has a little leisure, a little money, and a little strength that is not needed in the struggle for food and shelter and clothing. Then arises the question, what is he to do? At first thought the answer seems simple and easy. He has worked tremendously, has kept himself alive and a little more, and working is harder than playing. Why then should it be a problem to him how to use his first spare money and time and strength? But anybody who knows human nature knows that it is, on the contrary, a difficult stage in a young man's life — a crisis when, if he has a clearly defined taste or distinct liking for anything in the way of art of any kind, he may count that one of his most valuable assets.

The application is plain. As a people we are growing rich, so that we have some time and means to spare — more at least than in the pioneer days. Now is the time when delight in art may be of real use and serve high purposes.

Best of all, as a people we are abundantly temperamental. The American temperament, in its feeling for art, is the best in the world — a kind of cross between

the British and the French, and on the whole better than either.

It is because we have this temperament, and because we are now at that critical stage where art, bringing enthusiasm and inspiration and refreshment, can be of practical value, that the matter of drama study and the work of all drama leagues and clubs is of such timely interest. The theater has only just begun to do what it can do for us as a people. The relation between drama and life is not superficial, but in every way social, foundational and fundamental.

Dramatic art, for all its magic, is not the subtlest of the fine arts. Music, for example, is always considered subtler. Dramatic effects are broad and insistent. Nor need we claim that dramatic art is the greatest of all. It would be idle to speculate as to which is supreme. But drama is the most complex and universal of the arts. It includes all the others — literature, the plastic arts, and even music; and it demands more of its devotees than any other art — more knowledge of the world and of human nature, more feeling for craftsmanship in general, as well as for dramatic craftsmanship in particular.

The best brief definition of a play is that it is a comment on life, as the audience knows life, in terms of the actor, the stage, scenery, costuming, and numberless aids and accessories. The definition is more frequently put in this way: not that the play is a comment on life, which we are supposed to know enough about life to understand and recognize the truth of, but that it is a means of enlarging our experience and directly teaching us something we do not know. This is a dangerous and pathetic fallacy. If the drama directly enlarged the experience, then surely we ought

to send young people in flocks to the theater. Certainly they need experience. As a matter of fact, young people go to the theater rather too much, and their elders not enough. Witness Granville Barker, who says:

"The English Theater, for heaven knows how many years, has diligently driven out everybody over the age of twenty-five — I speak at any rate mentally, for there are plenty of people with gray hairs who will never be more than twenty-five. And you have got to get what you can call, in the strict sense of the word, an intelligent and amusing entertainment before you can get these people back."

The play should be an abiding delight, greater with every year that brings added insight into character and human nature and the world in which we live. It is something to grow up to. It interprets our hard won knowledge of life and makes comments upon it, instead of furnishing a kind of facile experience; or, to turn it the other way, the more we know about life, the greater our delight in the observations upon life that are made in the theater, and the more restoration and recreation we get out of them.

Drama and Literature

Plays are made or built, rather than written. We say this again and again, but we are reluctant to admit it, because it sounds mechanical. It is true, however, even of plays that have literary quality of the finest. Dramatic literature! The term is charged with meaning; and few indeed are the students or theatergoers who get and hold the meaning.

People in general seem to be divided into two

classes, not to say hostile camps, as regards their attitude toward the play.

First, there are the non-theatergoers, who regard the drama as literature and read it attentively apart from the theater, influenced a little perhaps, at present, by the matter of vogue. Some of these fireside readers have apparently forgotten even their old friend, the novel, to say nothing of poetry the divine, and the essay, which in its modern form is becoming so attractive. Certainly they have lost sight of the fact that drama, as literature alone, is rather a tiresome and clumsy mode of expression, to be put up with for one purpose only — to help us become more ideal spectators in the theater.

Then there are the inveterate theatergoers, casual and undiscriminating, who regard the play as something to be seen and heard, and not to be read at all. To them the play has no literary quality, but is merely a show. Sometimes they pronounce it a good show, and sometimes a poor one, but further than that they make no distinction. They become less and less critical in matters of good sense and good taste, they grow sated, their perceptions become dulled, and they demand more and more sensation. Hence they are the greatest possible temptation to managers and producers, who realize that in order to hold the jaded interest of such theatergoers, they must do worse and worse and more and more of it all the time.

The class of people who regard the play in the way in which it should be regarded, as dramatic literature, is small indeed.

A great play must be drama (which means nothing more than action) on the one hand, and literature on

the other hand; but it is an affair of the utmost difficulty to bring these two together. For literature has a tendency to escape or rise above or hold itself aloof from drama (action), and drama has a tendency to break loose in its own tremendous and untamable way from literature. Drama and literature are antagonistic, antipathetic, fornenst each other, as the Irish would say. And yet no great play was ever made until drama and literature were brought into some kind of harmony. Nor is any theatergoer an ideal spectator until he can set drama in one eye and literature in the other, and look on both impartially.

True, this is not always possible. We are sometimes obliged to examine and discuss plays without the help of stage interpretation, and hence often wander far afield in our speculations as to craftsmanship, meaning and intent.

Then we see many plays in the theater that are not obtainable in print or manuscript, and so cannot be weighed deliberately, apart from the frequent under-interpretation or over-interpretation or misinterpretation to which they are subjected in the theater.

Thus we often work at cross purposes in our study of the drama. But to repeat: Dramatic literature is of a peculiar and restricted and special kind. And the surest way to nail ourselves down to realization of its distinctive quality is to see it on the stage. The glow of the footlights is corrective and sanative, illuminating our minds when we strive to compass a play, and keeping us on the right track when we begin to interpret and follow the intellectual drift.

The ideal way to study a play is to see a performance of it before reading or analyzing. Such approach to the work is only reasonable deference to the author.

If we imagine ourselves for a moment in the trying situation of a playwright, we realize why it is that in almost every case he prefers to have the public see before reading. The more dramatic a play is — the better it is as a play — the more uncertainty just what is likely to come out on the stage when the player folk begin to act and react upon one another and upon the situations. Even the author is sometimes surprised at the revelations.

If we read a play first, we are apt to get wrong notions, conceiving the work as better than it is, or worse than it is, or more literary than it is, or (what is worse than all) as having more meaning than the author ever dreamed of putting into it.

Having seen a play fairly well presented, we can then read and analyze it to almost any extent without getting befogged into regarding it as literature merely, or morals merely, or anything but drama chiefly and whole-heartedly.

Preliminaries for Study

The best preliminary for drama study is to read with pencil and notebook in hand, extracting the story of the play, and setting down all events in chronological order. This is important, since the only way to observe how events have been handled, manipulated, transformed, in a word, dramatized, is to make sure what they were and in what order they came before the author began to handle them.

Then, having set forth the events of the play in story form, notice at what point the first curtain rises, and determine, if possible, why a beginning was made precisely there, instead of earlier or later.

Next consider the matter of building — the five parts which centuries ago established the custom of dividing the play into five acts. Today, although plays are more apt to have four acts or only three, they are built on the old lines. The five structural parts are still discernible, even when they have nothing to do with the division into acts.

These parts are:

First, the exposition or introduction.

Second, the rise, or growth, or crescendo, or development of the action.

Third, the climax, or top of the ladder, or apex of the pyramid, or sharpest turning point, or knot of the plot.

Fourth, the fall or decline, or diminuendo of the action.

Fifth, the close, or *dénouement*, or catastrophe, or disentangling of the lines of the plot and readjustment of the characters.

The Subtler Dramatic Qualities

Any fair beginning in the study of play structure must be made with some consideration for the mere framework. Good plays, like all vital and creative works of art, grow and develop by their own laws. But the study of organic parts cannot be carried far without at the same time taking into account many subtle qualities not easily explained or illustrated. Among these are: the shading and grading of effects; adroitness in making transitions; cumulative pressure toward the end; dramatic irony; direction and indirection in conveying information; the choice between the fixed character and the developing or deteriorating

character; and in general, everything pertaining to skill in overcoming difficulties, and economy in the use of materials and means.

Seeing a Play Twice

Finally: It is better to see one play twice than to see two plays of equal value, each of them once.

In the study of play structure, the following is suggested:

Select out of any season five plays which are in print and which are having fairly good representation on the stage. Then, in the case of each play, first see the stage performance; then read and analyze the play; then see it again on the stage; then reread it for final effect. Any one who does this for a season or two will be far on the way toward that general, non-professional understanding of play structure which he must have if he is to be a creative listener and spectator in the theater.

And the way is constantly attractive.

Not long ago, a strong advocate of the organized audience in the theater, who believed in drama study as a necessary preliminary, passed the very sensible remark that it is not difficult to encourage intelligent interest in good plays, because the study and discussion of everything pertaining to drama is always interesting and popular.

Which is merely another and more specific way of putting what Henry James said many years ago:

"The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle."

II

THE EXPOSITION AND THE EXCITING FORCE

Illustrated by "The Servant in the House"

By Charles Rann Kennedy

IN modern dramatic art, the introduction or exposition of the action, incorporated as it is in the play and forming part of the first act, has become a most interesting study. Its function obviously is to form a link between outside events and those inclosed and set apart in the play.

It seems a simple matter merely to give the audience information enough to make the onset of the action intelligible; but to present the facts dramatically and economically is not so easy. It taxes the ingenuity of the dramatist to the uttermost. Fortunately, at the beginning of the play he has himself and his material in hand, and can do as he pleases. The action has not yet gained the impetus that sweeps everything before it.

Three purposes the exposition must always serve: It must look backward, clearing away the mists that hang over the creation of the little world on the stage; it must look forward, especially as the introduction begins to merge into the growth of the action, so as to grapple this part firmly to the rest of the play and make it organic; and then it must be so interesting as

to beguile and befool the audience into thinking that the action has begun, when it is merely getting ready to begin. At the opening every moment is precious. It is far easier to keep the attention of the audience from the first than to recover it after it has been lost.

In present-day plays, the looking backward is often done by the gossiping servant, who, on the rising of the curtain, is discovered dusting the furniture and talking about the family affairs — as in Sardou's "Divorçons." The stage parlor maid, with her inefficient feather duster, is a frequent apparition. The returned traveller, asking for news, is also familiar to the theatergoer — as in Jones' "Whitewashing Julia." Then there are the two old friends who fall into a don't-you-remember mood and recite their reminiscences at the more or less impatient audience — as in "Hedda Gabler." Sometimes a hotel proprietor describes his guests to a newcomer — as in "The Man From Home." Occasionally a newspaper reporter is employed to draw out useful information in an interview — as in Pinero's "His House in Order." At this point in a play a great deal of information flies about that is more valuable to the audience than anyone can suppose it to be to the characters in the play; but we put up with the transparent illusions, because we know that there is one thing in a play worse than artificiality, and that is obscurity.

The looking forward is usually accomplished by touches of description which make the audience curious, so that the chief characters may have good "enters" when they appear on the stage. Hints of what is about to happen are continually thrown out, and important arrivals are announced with great commotion. The audience must at all costs be made anticipatory.

By way of making sure that the attention does not for a moment flag, a little fictitious excitement is often created that comes to nothing at all so far as the real action is concerned. A ball may be in progress — in the wings, of course. A dinner party may have just broken up. A dispute may be going on that threatens to become a quarrel.

Sometimes, at the very outset, a speech is uttered or an incident happens that is inevitably recalled at the far close of the play, thus creating an effect of completeness — a return of the action upon itself. This helps to deepen the central dramatic impression.

Most artistic of all is the employment of some device to set the tone of the piece and put the audience at once into the right mood, serious, hilarious, meditative, apprehensive or poetic, as the case may be. It is the highest art to do this artlessly.

An Adequate Exposition

"The Servant in the House" makes an adequate exposition, so that the audience is not puzzled and left in the dark, nor is its attention overtaxed, as often is the case in the too ingenious modern play. It is interesting to note how, here as elsewhere in this play, the commonest of means are adapted to the most uncommon ends.

The curtain rises upon two servants, one of whom is new to the place. Nothing is more ordinary than that. For the first few speeches, Manson keeps his back to the audience, so that when he turns he may achieve something like an entrance. But even before he faces about, the keynote is struck with no uncertain sound. The page boy is sure that he has seen this new

butler somewhere before — thinks perhaps it 's the reincarnation the *Daily Mail* has been writing about. What could be more admirable than this suggestion of the mystical atmosphere that is to enwrap the whole play?

The scene between the servants gives the exposition a backward look which is prolonged in the colloquy between Mary (who is a variation upon the familiar *ingénue* of so many modern plays) and the new butler. This conversation between the young girl and the newcomer finally culminates in the first dramatic revelation of the piece — Mary's recognition of her long-lost uncle, the Bishop of India, in the person of the servant Manson. Thus the audience is fully prepared for the fine irony of many subsequent speeches.

By way of looking backward again, the boy throws out an intimation that his master has not always been so high in the world. At this moment the vicar comes in, and to give matters a forward movement, remarks that he is expecting a visitor. Then he starts in surprise at the new butler, and is sure that *he* has seen him somewhere before. By the time it is made clear that the expected guest is the vicar's brother, the Bishop of India, and incidentally, that Mary is the daughter of another brother, the audience is pretty well prepared for the opening of the action.

As is frequently the case, however, the exposition overlaps the scene that introduces the exciting force. The audience has yet to learn that the vicar's wife's brother, the Bishop of Lancashire, is also expected to luncheon. This information is held back till after Mary and Manson have had their confidential talk, in the course of which the child describes the noisome condition of that drain which is impairing the usefulness at once of the

pulpit and the vicar's study, and which, since it has much to do with assembling the characters and giving the action a vigorous forward impulse, may be considered the strange, exciting force of the play.

All this time there is a slight bustle of preparation for that luncheon which, as the vicar's wife puts it, is to be quite a church congress, two bishops being expected. The fact that the play rounds itself to a conclusion just before luncheon time does not interfere with the enlivening effect of the preparations upon the expositional part of the action.

The speech at the beginning that is destined to be recalled at the end is Manson's "Then — Brother!" as he proffers his hand to be taken by the surprised vicar. The last speech of the play is in reply to the vicar's question: "In God's name, who are you?" Manson's answer is, "In God's name — your brother." Then the vicar clasps his hand as before, but this time sinks to his knees.

Thus the wheel turns full circle, and the central idea of brotherhood is firmly emphasized.

The Exciting Force

It is a temptation to linger over the art of making the exposition, because what it chiefly employs is ingenuity; and that is comparatively easy to explain and to understand. But when the action sets in, and events begin to happen inevitably, and the stress and strain begin to be felt, then even those who are fondest of taking the craftsman's view of a play are apt to be daunted, and to own themselves inadequate to do more than observe and wonder.

The exposition, however, must always be short and

shortened, and there is no avoiding the plunge into the action.

Two points are always discoverable in a good play, no matter what other technicalities are slighted or dispensed with altogether. There must somewhere emerge from the complications an exciting force to set the action in motion, and a climactic point or scene for the culmination of the plot.

The exciting or disturbing force is anything that operates to change the condition of affairs from balance or repose to that action or struggle which makes the play. In a thoroughly unified plot the effect of the disturbing force is plainly to be seen upon each of the principal characters in turn, and upon all the events as they succeed one another in the rise or growth of the action. The most elaborate dramatic mechanism may thus be set in motion by one and the same impulse or series of impulses.

In "The Servant in the House" the condition of the drain beneath the church and the vicar's study may be considered the starting point of the action, although that hardly brings the disturbing force within the narrow time limit of the play. The sequence of events is something like this:

1. The old church has fallen into a terrible state of decay.

2. The vicar starts a restoration fund and tries everything — all his rich friends, bazaars, jumble sales, special intercessions — everything!

3. The vicar's appeal to the public brings a letter from the Bishop of India, who promises to restore the church if anyone will help him.

4. The proviso "if anyone will help me" inspires the vicar's wife to summon her brother, the rich Bishop

of Lancashire, who, though he has always ignored the vicar, is now ambitious to be associated with the far-famed Bishop of India.

5. The vicar, meantime, has received another unexpected letter, this one from his reprobate brother Robert, who, after a silence of fifteen years, announces himself for a visit. The vicar telegraphs that he cannot entertain him (Robert), because the drains are up in the study. Robert inclines to believe it all a lie, but, since drains are in his line, comes to have a look at the vicarage in case there is really anything wrong.

So the bad drainage (which in its dramatic quality has, it must be admitted, an amusing side) not only starts up the action vigorously all through the play, but assembles the characters, by bringing upon the scene first Manson, then Robert and finally the Bishop of Lancashire.

It may be observed in passing that the outcome of the telegram to Robert is a perfect illustration of that reversal or recoil of action which has been a successful dramatic device ever since there were plays in the world. A time-honored means by which the action may be forced to rise toward a climax or swiftly fall to a catastrophe is to make a given expedient not only useless to bring about the result intended, but productive of exactly the opposite effect, thus recoiling upon itself. The vicar's excuse about the drains not only fails to stand off the undesirable brother, but serves to bring him speedily to the vicarage; a typical case of dramatic reversal.

It is perhaps wide of the mark to add that the style of plumbing at the vicarage is unfamiliar and somewhat startling. Any method of repair that would require the sewer pipes to be dragged out and displayed upon

the study carpet — however, it is probably a highly dramatic, not to say romantic, kind of plumbing, and that is doubtless better for stage purposes than anything more sanitary and convenient.

III

THE RISE OR GROWTH OF THE ACTION

Illustrated by "El Gran Galeoto"

By Jose Echegaray

BEFORE the action begins to develop, the exposition is partly or entirely finished, the chief characters have made their "enters" upon the stage, and the exciting force has been exerted. The situation at this point may be summed up by saying "Something must be done about it!" The decks are cleared for action, and the excitement begins to mount.

This sounds interesting; but no organic part of a play is more difficult to handle from the craftsman's standpoint than that which extends from the exciting force to the climactic point or scene. Doubtless the fact that this is, as far as the dramatists have deposed and testified, the hardest part to write, may account for the difficulties which oppose themselves to even the most patient analysis. "The dreadful second act!" cries the hapless wight who has a play on his mind, "If only I can manage that I shall be all right."

After William Archer's recent visit to this country he wrote: "I am credibly assured that at some universities the form of morning greeting among undergraduates is no longer 'How are you?' but 'How is your second act getting on?' I remarked that interest

might better be centered on the welfare of the last act, and was told that the undergraduate play seldom got so far as that."

The exposition is *made;* then the action *grows.* Vast is the difference between construction and development, and fortunate the dramatist or the novelist whose play or novel, having been well born and well brought up, throws off restraint and gets away from him altogether. The good effect of such constructive independence upon the novel or the play itself we realize by contrast when we are bored to extinction by drama or fiction (and there is plenty of both) in which to the dreary end every character is pushed and pulled and dragged about by the officious author, and every incident is a contraption and a contrivance.

We have arrived, then, at one of the difficulties met by the critic in observing this part of a play — namely, that here the action has begun to grow by natural laws based deep in human nature, so that even the dramatist himself is a trifle extraneous to his own creation. How fearfully he must watch the work of his own hands as it begins to move of itself! How he must dread to give the despoiling touch or make the awkward interposition! In fact, what he does, if he is honestly artistic, is mostly in the way of grading the movement, conserving the effect, and practicing the devices of retardation and delay, so that the climax may not be too quickly reached; for often the mere story from exposition to climax can be told in a few sentences.

To let the action go forward and yet hold it back, to spur it on and yet rein it in so that it may keep a natural pace — this it is, more than anything else in the making of a play, that stimulates the dramatic artist to his very highest endeavor.

In one sense it is more descriptive to say that the action repeatedly rises and falls than that it grows, because the advance is hardly ever steady. A zigzag line would represent the way in which the excitement now mounts and then is quieted, mounts still higher and is again restrained, till we have a series of situations and crises. All the time, too, there must be a cautious prevision of the later scenes in the play, in which it is always difficult to maintain the suspense. After the climax there must be a drawing together of all the loose threads in the earlier part of the play, else there will be at the close that impression of unfinished lines of action which distracts and antagonizes an audience, even though few people in the house may realize what is the matter.

It is perhaps overstatement to say that the growth of the action is more difficult to manage than the climax. It is, however, less inevitable; and then, in the modern play, which has forsworn the soliloquy and the *tirade*, the carrying power of the climax must depend very much upon the strength of the dramatic pressure back of it. The *dénouement*, too, which tries the very soul of the artist, depends closely upon the earlier scenes. It is far easier to untie a neatly made knot than to loosen and straighten out a wild tangle.

Then there is the mode of presentation — the direction or indirection with which the audience is made acquainted with the events that form the plot. This is a more intricate problem here than later in the play. The action cannot all take place on the stage. What parts then shall be acted before the audience, what parts shall be supposed to take place out of sight and then be related on the stage by some character, and what parts is it safe to let the audience guess at or infer? This, withal, precipitates the subtle question of values;

because what the audience sees will necessarily have a higher dramatic value than what it hears or overhears at second hand. And the preservation of the right scale of values is complicated today as never before by the ambition to limit the number of characters, and make as few changes of scene as possible.

Another complication arises from the fact that, always when a play has four or five acts, and sometimes when it has only three, one entire act is comprised in the growth of the plot. That is, the action generally gets under way in the first act and does not come to a climax till somewhere in the third or later; and so its "reach" completely overspreads the second act. Now, an act must achieve, for ends more theatrical than dramatic, some arrangement of its own, irrespective of its relation to the play. It must have a beginning, a middle and an end; and the end must have a certain cumulative effect. To preserve these constructive qualities within the act, and yet not allow it to obstruct or divert the pressure toward the climax, is another difficulty.

It goes without saying that the true craftsman, knowing, as he usually does, everything about his art, and something about everything else under the sun, has a serene mastery over this, as over all other parts of his work. But it is easy to figure to oneself the distraction of the mere dramatic tinker while he is knocking together this first half of his unsteady construction.

It is an endless theme, this growth of the earlier parts of a play; and only a few points can be illustrated.

Growth of Action Illustrated

In "The Great Galeoto" we have the familiar Paolo-and-Francesca or Launcelot-and-Guinevere situation, in-

volving the elderly husband, the young wife and the young lover, between whom and the husband there is a strong attachment. The old material seems to have undying interest, perhaps because it mingles so inextricably the direst tragedy and the deepest pathos. It makes the exposition rather easy, although the usual preliminaries are always necessary, whether the story be old or new. Moreover, in the present play the point of departure is not quite that of the old legends. We are given to understand that the young wife and the adopted son are not only innocent of any thought of evil, but would have remained so had they not been driven to desperation by the torture of the merest small talk — not slander, but listless, aimless, dispassionate gossip.

In this connection it must be observed that no play has more adroitly achieved the difficult task to which the modern drama so often addresses itself — that of keeping the world out, and yet letting it come in. The interest is narrowed and centered, and the attention of the audience is strictly economized; for even in the new version there are only seven characters, and two stage settings. It is all very different from the old plays, in which the characters swarmed, or roamed in and out on the slightest pretense, and where there was a new setting for every scene. Yet there is none of the vague feeling of isolation, of being swung out into space away from all social environment, which detracts from so many works of the Ibsenic school. The world presses in on all sides, and the atmosphere is deep and rich and vital — deplorably vital, it is true; but that is unavoidable with the chosen motive. It is high art to create a complex effect by means so simple and uncomplicated.

Aside from the idle gossip there is almost no ex-

citing force, unless the plan of the secretaryship may be said to give a forward impulse. The action, then, begins with a situation of perfect balance and repose, in which the principal characters (described as an innocent woman and two honest men) are quite harmonious. In less than two acts it culminates in the total wreck of the household. Two lives are blighted and the third is terminated in a duel. What could be a finer effect than to give this rapid and stupendous growth any appearance of probability, any semblance of the inevitable? It is too long to trace the steps; but there are forward and backward movements even in the swiftness of its stealthy advance. Seldom is dramatic art, in this part of a play, so severely tested and tried.

But strangest and best of all, considering the southern origin of the play, is the indirection of the action. The two duels, both of which result fatally, are kept off the stage. Even the café scene (it would mean a crowd), with its quarrel and challenge, is present in description merely. There is no villain, for Don Severo, who comes nearest, is not at all the old stage type, in mantle and sombrero.

Now when a Spanish dramatist resolutely banishes the cloak-and-dagger scenes of his play to the wings, and denies himself the consolation of creating a black-browed villain, he is bound to do something desperate to make up for it.

It is a thrilling outcome of this artistic self-denial in keeping the crowds and fights out of view of the audience, that the restrained power of the tragic force falls upon gossip, the despicable Galeoto of the play. So intensely catastrophic is the culmination that it overtops all earlier effects. To give a mere abstraction like

idle talk such potency of life, to make it terrible enough in its might to turn the action of a convincing tragedy, and then to pursue it swiftly and vindictively to a direful catastrophe — this is to triumph over difficulties.

The one tragedy of gossip in dramatic literature — mark how it stands midway between comedy of gossip and tragedy of slander — is the work of Echegaray. Perhaps it was providential that this material fell into the hands of a Spanish dramatist. Who else could force such an action to rise so swiftly and magnificently?

IV

THE CLIMAX

Illustrated by "Disraeli"

By Louis Napoleon Parker

THERE are many devices that lead on and up to climactic effects in a play; but the most important is suspense, causing tension, and eventuating in something unexpected and surprising.

We have come to use the term "climax" as meaning the top round of a ladder, when in reality it means, now as always, the ladder itself.

The successive rungs in the dramatic ladder are a series of effects, similar in quality but of increasing power and impressiveness, creating suspense, and presently culminating in some effect more powerful than any other in the play. Suspense is, and ever will be, until human nature is revised and edited into something altogether different, the most potent spell that a drama can cast over an audience. "Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait," is good advice to the playwright. It is easy to recall great plays that never made an audience laugh, and others that never drew the tribute of a tear; but the play that never at any point made an audience *wait* would have to be sought for with diligence. It needs no argument to prove that tension is an effect which must be created as early as possible

in a play, and then preserved as long as possible. All that is necessary is to show that dramatic suspense is different from suspense in general, and that, like everything else in the severe and exacting art of making plays, it is hard to manage.

We are always coming upon paradoxes in the study of dramatic technique; but the most arresting paradox of all may be formulated after this fashion: The surprises of the stage must be long foreseen, and the unexpected events must be anticipated by the audience. This, obviously, is an invigorating trial of skill. Playwright and actor in closest conspiracy have all they can do to harmonize preparation for an event with tension while awaiting it, and knowledge of what is coming with surprise when at length it comes. It is not untried or experimental, this theory of dramatic suspense, or, more exactly, of dramatic irony. It is the experience of the ages. Observing it plays have lived, and as a penalty for disregarding it many plays have died. It is the source and spring and life of almost all successful dramatic effects, comedic as well as tragic.

Dramatic irony, like irony in general, says one thing and means another, the very opposite of what is said; and, like all irony, it needs interpretation. Something apart from the words must help us to understand what is meant. We must see something, or hear something, or divine something that will point the significance. In a play the actors are continually making speeches that have two meanings — one on the stage, the other off; one for the players in their assumed characters, the other for the spectators. The inhabitants of the mimic world deceive one another, entangle one another, and are duped, bewildered and baffled as in life; but the audience is thrilled or delighted by the deception or the

bewilderment — not only understands it, but foresees it at almost every point. The most awful disasters may be hanging low over the heads of the unconscious *dramatis personæ*, and the most ingenious traps may be set for their blundering feet, but the audience is in the secret of them all.

How, then, do the spectators see and foresee so much and so clearly? It is a distinctly contrived effect. The dramatist works continually with the audience and never against it. It has been said that the spectator is part author of the play. Certainly he is in the author's confidence, so that he may foresee the crises with a kind of clairvoyance, dread the disasters with awe and fear, anticipate the discomfitures with amusement, and indulge himself in that thoughtful laughter which we are told true comedy should always awaken.

There must, in the nature of things, be this prevision on the part of the audience. The seat in the theater is not the easy-chair by the reading lamp. The man at the play has no time to reason anything out for himself. He may not, like the reader of a novel, turn back to review earlier chapters or forward to snatch the outcome from the closing pages. The novelist works against the reader, but the dramatist is ever with the spectator.

The distribution, then, of the forces in the theater is — the audience and the playwright on one side of the footlights and the player folk on the other. The spectator objects to being puzzled. There is a wide variance between the gentle reader and the savage ticket buyer. The one, having perhaps borrowed his novel from a friend or from the nearest library, has no stakes on; the other, having paid his money at the box office, proposes to find fault if he is not able to seize promptly

upon every point in the play. Sometimes he seems not to mind being fairly hemmed in and driven to an understanding of the plot.

Having, then, by means of dramatic suspense, which is its own kind, reached the top of the ladder, what effects do we usually find worked out before we begin to come down? Two only may be mentioned. We often find reversal of the action, and involved with it, or at no far remove, the sudden recognition or revelation of some character. Reversal or recoil is merely the old device by which a train of events produces the opposite of the effect intended; and recognition usually clears up a mistaken identity or unexpectedly brings upon the scene some one whose sudden appearance is momentous. These are powerful elements of emotional interest, and when they are brought together they are likely to make a dominating crisis.

There are various and interesting kinds, one might almost say classes, of dramatic recognition. The oldest and most fatigued of all is the kind that discovers the long lost, etc. Mistaken identities in prose fiction and in the drama! A ponderous tome might be written on the subject. The drama has always been enamored of them, and is desperately clinging to them even now, though by all laws of common sense they belong to an earlier and darker age. However, the realist achieves an interesting variation by making a sudden recognition of some one's true nature take the place of the discovered masquerader or the returned prodigal. "Torvald," exclaims Nora, "in that moment it burst upon me that I had been living here these eight years with a strange man"; and so strong is the spiritual pressure back of these simple words that we find the situation quite as thrilling as the one, for example,

which unmasks Hero to Claudio at the altar. Then, too, there is the sudden confrontation, which at any time and in any play may be used with honest dramatic effect.

Climax Illustrated

Mr. Parker's "Disraeli," a popular dramatization of certain episodes in the great Jew's career, well illustrates the skill needed in arranging the materials of a play so that events may be intelligible, and the interest may move steadily toward a controlling and dramatic climax. Slight as this play is, in the matter of constructive preparation and careful direction of lines of plot toward approaching crises, it is worthy of Sardou or Augier. And its technical points are perhaps more easily observed than if its theme were of deeper import and significance.

First it may be noted that the author disavows any attempt to make an historical play, claiming only to show "a picture of the days — not so very long ago — in which Disraeli lived, and some of the racial, social, and political prejudices he fought against and conquered."

To be exact, the play is plotted in 1875, and pictures only a few weeks out of Disraeli's later life, about six years before his death.

The reason for choosing this period is evident enough. The young Disraeli, with his brocaded waistcoats, his brooches and massy chains, his morning cane and his evening cane, was a picturesque figure; but there was nothing dramatic about him. The Disraeli of middle life, playing opposite to Gladstone (they seem created for dramatic purposes) against a complicated political

and social background, may one day be the hero of historical drama at its greatest; but the time is not yet.

As for the Disraeli of the Suez Canal scheme, he is an alluring hero for high comedy. He dreams in empires, merely to give the public an occasional sensation. He dickers with the Khedive of Egypt and buys the key to India amid roars of popular applause, though nothing in particular comes of the bargain in the end. With infinite flourish he bedecks his queen with her new title, Empress of India, though as soon as the excitement subsides the whole nation feels such addition superfluous to the ancient style of the English sovereigns. He extorts concession from Russia by menace which has nothing back of it. His triumphs often prove, when stripped of his own grandiloquent phrasing, clear cases of much ado about nothing.

The play is made after the approved fashion in historic drama, with an outer action and an inner action, the outer plot being a setting or frame of authentic history, while the inner plot is invented or created. In workmanlike fashion, too, the smaller plot reaches out to the larger, and the larger draws in upon the smaller, to the enlivenment and enrichment of both.

The outside or enveloping plot is concerned with Disraeli's struggle to outwit the Russian government and be first to make terms with Ismail of Egypt for his controlling interest in the Suez Canal. But such a conflict to be interesting in a theater must be focused to some personal issue that can work itself out in the narrow limits of the modern stage. Hence we have among the characters Mrs. Travers, a beautiful and brilliant *intrigante* acting as spy for Russia, and Lord Deeford, a stolid young Briton, whom Disraeli, having

broken to his uses, sends post-haste to overtake the Russian embassy on its way to Egypt.

The inside or enveloped plot is the love affair of Lord Deeford and Lady Clarissa, which, to be saved from commonplace romanticism, must be interwoven with the larger interest so that its points of suspense may coincide with the crises in affairs of state.

Needless to say, it is the capable Dizzy who holds the threads of outer and inner plot in his hands and ties them neatly in the same knot.

In other words, having the childless man's interest in young people's lovemaking, Disraeli plays fairy godfather to bring Deeford and Clarissa together; but having also the diplomat's eye for men who may be useful, he makes the hope of winning Clarissa spur Charles to superhuman effort in his expedition to Egypt.

This framework, adroitly elaborated as to details, holds up three of the four acts.

It is clear that the climax must directly involve Disraeli and Mrs. Travers, and indirectly affect the amusing lovers who have been so irresistibly drawn into the whirlpool of Disraeli's machinations.

As there are four acts altogether, the audience expects a culmination somewhere in the third. But before the first act is half over, we are informed in unequivocal terms what events are working toward a climax. Witness this dialogue between Disraeli and Sir Michael Probert, manager of the Bank of England.

Probert. Do you seriously mean you are thinking of purchasing the Suez Canal?

Disraeli. I have seldom meant anything half so seriously. . . .

Probert. Why in such a hurry?

Disraeli. Because Russia knows of this opportunity to purchase the highroad to India.

Probert. Then why has n't she purchased it?

Disraeli. She 's not ready — she has no fleet; but — she is watching us. She is watching me —

(Mrs. Travers opens a small casement in the French window and listens.)

Later in the act, after Probert, pronouncing the scheme hair-brained, contemptuously refuses all assistance, the end is even more plainly prefigured.

Disraeli. Nothing is final, Sir Michael. I may send for you again.

Further on, in a colloquy between Dizzy and his faithful Mary, occurs this significant plot line:

Disraeli. I have been searching for a young man. With such a prize as Clarissa, Deeford may become just what I need.

But these speeches, like all strongly structural lines, accomplish several ends. They not only look forward, but meantime bring on the stressed scene of the first act, with the audience fully in the secret. When Disraeli, in the longest speech of the play, makes his spectacular and rhetorical appeal to Deeford, urging him to pass from the Parish to the Empire, the dazed young man but partially understands what is meant. The audience, however, gets the full effect of Disraeli's pyrotechnical speech and Deeford's slowly brightening imagination. This sends down a good curtain.

In the second act there is deliberate preparation for the recognition, which in time-honored fashion is to form part of the climax. It is Disraeli who first realizes that Foljambe, one of his clerks, is in league with Mrs. Travers. But his revelation of this discovery to Deeford and Clarissa is pointed at the audience, so that

when Mrs. Travers' last disguise is thrown off, the irony of the situation may be sharpened, and her defeat may come with full dramatic force.

Disraeli. Foljambe and Mrs. Travers are agents — spies — sent here by Russia.

Then comes the culmination of the second act, always difficult to manage. Deeford, spurred on by the masterful Dizzy, undertakes to follow Foljambe on his flight to Egypt. First he plans to leave "the day after tomorrow," then "tomorrow," then he thinks it possible that he might make ready to go by the night mail, and finally he rushes off at the end of ten minutes.

Deeford. But my luggage —! I sha'n't have even a clean collar!

Disraeli. Damn your collar! Catch the Dover Express at eleven from Charing Cross. You will be in Marseilles tomorrow morning, and in Cairo a day ahead of Foljambe — a day ahead!

Soon after the opening of the third act we are conscious that the action is moving in the familiar dramatic zigzag, falling and rising, falling again still lower, and rising again a little higher, till it reaches its highest point. First is indicated the tiresome suspense and discouragement, as Disraeli and Clarissa wait for the cable from Deeford. Then arrives the cable, "The Suez Canal purchase is completed and the check accepted." Deeford is expected to arrive with trumpets blowing, drums beating, flags flying and wedding bells ringing.

Then comes the sharpest turn in the play. Enter Hugh Myers, the banker who has stood behind Disraeli in this transaction. To the horror of everyone, he announces that he has gone bankrupt, that Russia has ruined him, and that his check drawn on the Bank of

England is waste paper. (Exit Myers in the depth of despair.)

(Enter then Lady Beaconsfield.)

Disraeli. Mary, you have stood by me in many predicaments. I am in the worst I was ever in. It 's horrible. I am tied hand and foot.

The lowest point has now been reached, and everything is ready for the swiftly mounting climax.

Then follows an effective comedic reversal. Mrs. Travers is announced. To deceive her into thinking that nothing momentous is happening, Disraeli hastily ties himself into his dressing-gown, falls upon a sofa, and feigns to be very weak and ill. Gradually, as he feebly converses, he leads up to a full recognition of Mrs. Travers as a spy whom he knew in Switzerland years before; and finally, by pretending to exult over the cable from Deeford, he surprises from her a boastful assertion that it is she who has plotted to bankrupt Myers.

All this provides a striking setting for the desperate climactic expedient. Probert, who meantime has been peremptorily summoned, arrives in a suspicious and obstinate frame of mind. Disraeli is determined upon a last brilliant *coup* to force the Bank of England to honor Myers' check. He bears down upon Probert so suddenly and powerfully, threatening to smash the Bank and disgrace the board of directors, that the Manager is fairly swept off his feet, and signs the note almost before he realizes what he is doing.

Probert. There, take your paper. I have signed it. I have signed it to save the Bank. It is outrageous that a man like you should have such power. (Exit.)

Clarissa (with joyous enthusiasm). Oh, Mr. Disraeli, thank God you have such power!

Then comes the whimsical tag so frequently appended to the close of a strenuous act in high comedy. In this case it happens to be extremely characteristic of the great Tory minister, who more than once in his career forced an issue by boldly assuming power when he had it not.

Disraeli. I have n't, dear child; but he does n't know that.

It is praise to say that the figure of the great Tory minister is transferred from the pages of history to the pages of the play. It is higher praise to say that the society of his time is so revived as to form a harmonious background for his every appearance. But, greatest achievement of all, the colloquy is kept so perfectly in key that when Disraeli utters an epigram it is given a fine spontaneity. This makes the play worthy to be called dramatic literature.

Of the last act we are perhaps unduly critical, having become accustomed to the indeterminate endings in problematic drama. Such a play as this, being historic or semi-historic, can hardly be expected to raise questions, psychological or otherwise. Not closing with an interrogation point, then, it must close with a period. Act III comes to an admirable comedy climax, it is true — so good, indeed, that no reader will regret the change from the original version. But if it brought down the final curtain the audience would be likely to go away dissatisfied. The worst that can be said of Act IV is that Mr. Parker therein takes occasion to gratify his lifelong fondness for pageantry.

V

THE FALL AND CLOSE OF THE ACTION

Variously Illustrated

IN all the older plays, and in most of the newer ones, the fourth division of the structure is that which extends from the climax to the close — or to the catastrophe, if there is an ultimatum distinctly set off at the end of the final act. This part of the play is variously called the fall, descent, return or diminuendo of the action; and it accomplishes the disentangling of the lines of plot and the resolution of the dramatic forces.

Climax further Considered

Its starting point, to repeat, is the climax; which furnishes an occasion for saying, first of all, that continued study of the framework of plays, on and off the stage, tends to make one not more, but rather less confident in the determination of the climactic point or scene. It is not merely that dramatic excitement often culminates in successive waves; but quite as frequently there are evolved out of the plot two different kinds of climax, one of action, the other of emotion. The maker of a play, recognizing the certainty that the more obvious climax will appeal to one class of spectators, and the more spiritual effect to another, does not always wish nor intend to make the two appeals at

the same time. Another complication is caused by the fact that sometimes neither of these climaxes is placed at the exact point where the plot makes its most definitive turn. So that, in any drama, there may be three or even more places, each of which seems, to one order of intelligence or another, the very highest point of the action.

The best constructed of all Shakespeare's tragedies well illustrates the difficulty — which, strictly speaking, is no difficulty at all — in pointing out the climax. The plot of "Othello" manifestly turns in the central scene of the central act, almost precisely in the middle of the play, with Othello's last protestation to Desdemona — "when I love thee not, chaos is come again." Up to that time his trust and devotion have grown; from that time on his distrust and suspicion grow. At the moment, however, there is nothing about this avowal which makes it more impressive to the audience than some of the surrounding speeches. In the minds of the more thoughtful spectators the climax of the play is the point, wherever they may see it most plainly, at which it becomes evident to them that Othello's mind has been thoroughly poisoned by Iago. It is the poisoning process that makes the tragedy, and what it may sooner or later lead to is a minor consideration. On the other hand, to the more literal minded, and to those who like to sup full of horrors, the whole build of the play is catastrophic. From the first rise of the curtain there is disaster in the very air, and they consider that everything leads to the smothering scene. To them that is the most tremendous effect in the play. All of which is merely another way of saying that Shakespeare understood human nature and made practical use of his insight in his attitude toward the audience.

Now what is true of this, one of the greatest plays in the world, is equally true of lesser ones. To all but the most literal minded, dramatic climax may be a somewhat debatable point, the play in question, withal, gaining rather than losing by the uncertainty. As a consequence, then, it is not always clear just where the fall of the action may be said to begin.

The Fall of the Action

However, the grading toward the close must begin somewhere, and must have some continuity, even in the most abruptly ended play. And the study of this closing part of the action has its own special interest.

It is considered a critical and trying organic part of the play to create, and often the dramatist seems minded to shorten it by thrusting the climax as far as possible toward the finale. Tension must be conserved, though suspense is well-nigh over; and yet it is no place to introduce new expedients. A clumsy or too obvious device is here more despoiling than elsewhere, and a false note in sentiment may destroy many honest effects created in earlier scenes. Lightness of touch is chiefly needed, and there is peculiar grace in staying the hand altogether. If the action in the up grade from exposition to climax has been allowed to develop by natural laws, without officious pushing and pulling on the part of the author, the descent need be little more than gradual undoing of what was successfully done in the ascent. The devices of retardation and delay must again be practiced, lest the end be too speedily reached; the obstacles to a prosperous or an unhappy ending must be removed one at a time; and here, as elsewhere

in the play, much of the colloquy must be dramatically ironic, the audience being still best pleased when allowed to foresee all the surprises and anticipate all the unexpected events.

In the midst of many difficulties the dramatist finds one real help, which, like all artistic easements, may be sadly abused. As the play draws to a close, the cumulation of interest makes all temporary suspense more exciting than usual. In the downward plunge of a tragedy, a moment of reaction or a slight gleam of hope will often be greeted with a sigh of relief all over the house; while humor, even of a somewhat commonplace variety, will cause hysterical laughter. In comedy, a truly comedic turn in affairs is more excruciatingly funny toward the end than anywhere else in the play. The slightest hindrance or break in the final movement to the close is of exaggerated effect, no matter what the dramatic form.

It is apparent that here, more than elsewhere, the playwright is tempted to substitute explanation and description for action. The messenger speeches of Greek tragedy linger unaccountably, under one disguise or another; and often they go near to spoil a modern play by being intrusted (as they were not with the Greeks) to minor actors, who report the direst disasters with the effect of announcing that dinner is served.

The Close of the Play

But this brings us to the catastrophic or conclusive point, which is of far greater interest than any other in the latter part of a play, and far more dangerous to manage. Over the methods of winding up the action the romanticists and the realists have fought many

pitched battles and are skirmishing to the present day. The criticism which the newer school brings to bear upon the older is that the conventional romantic endings were too final to carry conviction with them. It is not merely that old tragedy often closed with universal slaughter, in which it was plain that some of the characters were involved merely because that was the easiest way to dispose of them; but the happy ending is apt to be quite as mechanical. Often the curtain descends upon reward, retribution, fruition and achievement so far beyond earthly experience that the characters might as well be overwhelmed in an earthquake, for all the interest that the audience feels in their subsequent fortunes. The attitude of the dramatist toward his material seemed, until recently, to be wrong and out of the normal. So the realist took counsel with himself after this wise: In making a play it is necessary to choose a certain action or series of actions extending over a given space of time; and in order to use this material the playwright is compelled to separate it from the ceaseless stream of events of which it forms a part. But it is most untruthful and inartistic to treat the piece of life that he has chosen as if it existed by itself and had no relation to the world at large. In making the beginning of his play he must recognize that what gives the forward impulse to his plot forms the close of much that has happened before. In bringing his play to a conclusion he must convey the impression that the world continues to move. If it is possible to do so he must allow his audience to depart, realizing that even though mistaken identities are cleared up, virtue rewarded, crimes punished and betrothals celebrated, the dramatic characters are after all neither more nor less than human beings, who, if they are to remain in this vale of friction,

will probably find other joys and sorrows in store for them.

Unquestionably the older plays managed their opening far better than their closing scenes. It is not difficult to recall old tragedies and comedies in which the expositions are made with the utmost adroitness, showing many glimpses of the past, and drawing lines of action from various quarters to converge at the point where the plot must make its beginning. But the endings are apt to be tremendously conclusive, without any reaching out toward the future, as if all the world had come to an end with the fall of the curtain upon the little world of the stage.

It was chiefly in revolt against the romanticistic conclusion that the realist began to experiment in his own kind of construction. In fiction, he abandoned the chronicle and the biographic and autobiographic form, and substituted the cross section of life, shortening the time very greatly, and using an ingenuity of mechanism unknown to his predecessors. In the drama, he foreswore the old processional form, in which events happened in order of time, and endeavored to bring all the resources of his art to the creation of a situation, which should be so vividly set before the spectators that it might safely be left with them, without involving itself in the crudity of an absolute conclusion. In both novel and play, having left behind the old story-telling form, he was compelled to introduce his characters under new auspices, strengthen the action by new effects, and create and preserve the illusion by new hints and suggestions.

There is space for only one illustration. Compare, for example, the *dénouement* of "The Lady of Lyons" with that of "A Doll's House." The former old favorite is certainly much worse at the end than at the be-

ginning. At the close of the fifth act, after it has been inserted into Pauline's head that Claude is not Morier and is Melnotte, the debt is paid, Beauseant is defeated, divorce proceedings are given over, and Claude and Pauline are reunited. They still live, but to the audience they are as dead as Romeo and Juliet. Life seems to mean nothing more to them. Really, although "A Doll's House" may not be a model play, it seems by contrast more than ever a stroke of genius that the closing of the door at the end of it should have set the world to talking, and kept it talking for a generation. Poor little Nora has perhaps been overmuch worried by the critics, but it should be some consolation to her that she has even now a potency of life such as Pauline could not boast in the days of her pristine glory.

The Foolish Old Ending

It is discouraging to observe that the appetite of the public for ultimate sentimentality and untruthful moralistic effects seems to be almost as robust as ever. It is still popular to make the prodigal return unexpectedly at holiday time, when the snow is piled against the window without, and the turkey is steaming on the dinner table within. Mistaken identities are not yet consigned to the limbo of unrealism, though it is becoming more and more difficult for anybody to disappear anywhere without being detected and brought back. As the dean of American letters remarked some years ago, people still enjoy being melted and horrified and astonished and blood-curdled and goose-fleshed, especially if they are comfortably chippered-up at the end. But the realists never set out to be reformers. They merely claim that life and human

nature are worth studying with a patience and self-abnegation which refuses to do more than observe and wonder. They know that it is useless to add anything to nature to embellish it, or take anything away from it to refine it. And if they can correct the old methods a little here, and adjust them a little there, they are very well satisfied.

VI

ANALYSIS OF "A DOLL'S HOUSE"

To Illustrate all Technical Points Previously Mentioned

FOLLOWING the suggestions in the first chapter, the study is begun by relating, in chronological order, the events which took place before the first curtain rises. As "A Doll's House" is catastrophic (see next chapter), the story is of some length.

The "Story" of "A Doll's House"

About 1850 there lived, in a small town in Norway, a man of extravagant tastes, a spendthrift, who was continually in debt, and was sometimes accused of dishonesty. He was a widower with an only child, a daughter, who was much like himself, and whom he indulged and spoiled, calling her his doll child, and playing with her as she played with her dolls.

Her name was Nora; and she becomes the heroine of this play.

As the heroine, then, she must be in the center of a group of characters closely related, but so set apart from the rest of the world that the plot can work itself out free from casual interruptions. Nora probably had many friends, for, like her father, she was of a social nature. But Ibsen, always economical of minor char-

acters, selects only one of these friends to help form the setting — Nora's schoolmate, Christina, who becomes the Mrs. Linden of the play.

Christina is a girl in rather poor circumstances, who has lost her father, and whose mother and younger brothers are in need of help. She may be described as having a trait which Ibsen admired more than any other — moral courage. And she proves to be the only character in the play who has this trait.

While Nora is still very young, she marries impulsively, and without much deep feeling. She soon finds that Torvald Helmer is the direct opposite of her father — cautious, conservative, fearful of debt, conventional, and rather pompous and self-righteous. She discovers, too, that he is destitute of moral courage. He has been in government service, but seeing little prospect of advancement, he begins to practice law after his marriage. He and Nora make their home in Christiania.

Christina falls in love genuinely and sincerely with a man by the name of Krogstad, a college chum of Helmer's, who is also a lawyer. But Krogstad is poor, and Christina is greatly burdened, for her mother has become bedridden, and her young brothers need an education. She has another suitor who is well-to-do, and whom she thinks it her duty to marry. Believing that if she breaks with Krogstad, it is only right to try to put an end to his love for her, she writes him a heartless-sounding letter, saying she has ceased to care for him. She then marries the other suitor, Linden by name, who has the means to make her and her mother and brothers comfortable. But the marriage proves unhappy.

Krogstad, disappointed, disheartened, and ship-

wrecked (as he afterwards says), removes to Christiania where he marries — unhappily too — and lives in poverty and discomfort.

Meantime Helmer, Nora's husband, overworks in building up his law practice, so that a year after his marriage he falls ill, and is ordered to Italy to save his life. But there is no money. Nora dares not go to her father to ask help, for he is ill and not expected to live. So in despair, and without her husband's knowledge, she appeals to Krogstad, who negotiates a loan for her, with her father as security. But Nora is unable to get her father's signature, and so forges his name on the promissory note. Furthermore, she dates the endorsement three days after her father's death — thus incriminating herself. Krogstad knows all about this, but sympathizes as an old friend, and has at the time no motive for revealing it or making trouble.

Nora's view of the matter is refreshing. She explains later that if the law takes no account of motives, it must be very bad indeed. "Do you mean to tell me," she exclaims to Krogstad, "that a daughter has no right to spare her dying father anxiety? — that a wife has no right to save her husband's life? I don't know much about the law, but I 'm sure that somewhere or other you will find that *that* is allowed."

Nora and Helmer go to Italy for a year. Of their life there we know only one detail. At Capri, Nora learns to dance the tarantella, that wild dance which the Neapolitans throw themselves into when they are glad, and when they are sad, and when they are mad. This becomes the symbol of the play.

Helmer's health being restored, he and Nora return to Christiania, where they live frugally. Nora saves from her personal allowance, and sometimes works at

copying far into the night, in order to pay installments and interest on her debt; and she practices all kinds of deception, to keep her husband in ignorance of the matter.

At this point it becomes evident how complex is Helmer's character. His fear and loathing of debt is creditable rather than otherwise; but with it is involved a pompous superiority, a dislike to owe anything to his doll of a wife, and a dastardly cowardice in face of the world's opinion.

As time goes on there are three children, and they are all as contented as is possible in the circumstances, not realizing that a doll's house can never be a real home.

Krogstad, meantime, is living in bitter poverty, with a large family to support. Once when his wife is very ill he forges a note, feeling that he is doing no worse than many others. The crime becomes generally known, though it does not get into the courts, and Krogstad finds himself down and out. Finally he is forced to take a subordinate position in the Joint Stock Bank of Christiania.

Mrs. Linden continues to live in the small town from which they all came. Her husband dies, leaving his affairs in a bad state. She struggles for three years to support her mother and brothers, doing everything possible to turn an honest penny. At intervals she does some office work.

Finally, eight years after Nora's forgery, an event happens which, though it seems as ordinary and commonplace as all the rest, is eminently *dramatic*. That is, it starts up a train of events out of which a play can be made. Or, to use another figure, it begins to tangle the life lines of these four people into a knot

which, once it is tied, will mark an effective dramatic culmination.

Helmer is made manager of the Joint Stock Bank.

This brings the affairs of Nora, Helmer, Mrs. Linden and Krogstad to one and the same crisis, in this way:

Krogstad foresees at once that Helmer, whom he knows of old, will throw him out of the bank. Now Krogstad has held his position very creditably for a year and a half. His sons are growing up, and he is trying for their sake to win back his respectability. His foot is on the first rung of the ladder, and he is desperate at the thought of being kicked off, back into the mire. So he goes to Nora, and threatens to expose her forgery if she does not plead for him with Helmer. And he is very explicit in what he says to Nora: "This I may tell you — if I 'm flung into the gutter a second time, you shall keep me company."

The Use of the Material

But this is not the play: it is merely preparation. The play is just ready to begin. All these details, which make a rather long story and take some time in the telling, must be woven into the dramatic warp and woof, the play all the time making progress — forging ahead, as well as looking backward to bring in all these facts.

Thus we begin to see, faintly and vaguely, what it means to *build* a play. Every great speech must do three things at the same time: it must reveal character, it must keep the plot moving, and it must be interesting on its own account.

To illustrate how the briefest lines may be so skill-

fully worded and so adroitly introduced as to serve several structural purposes at one and the same time, the following passage from Act III may be quoted. Nora is in colloquy with her old nurse.

Nora. Dear old Anna — you were a good mother to me when I was little.

Anna. My poor little Nora had no mother but me.

Nora. And if my little ones had nobody else, I am sure you would — nonsense, nonsense!

From these few words we learn something of the past, namely, that Nora was a motherless child. We also learn something about the present, namely, that Nora is becoming desperate and planning flight or suicide. In the same instant also a fact is planted or impressed upon the attention of the audience to be recalled later — the fact that Nora's children have always been in the care of the motherly nurse who reared Nora herself. This recurs with significant meaning when Nora finally leaves her home without a last look at the children, saying, "I know they are in better hands than mine."

To accomplish so many purposes in such brief, effortless, unforced speeches, without break in the dialogue or pause in the steady development of the plot, is art indeed — the high and difficult art of dramaturgy.

Building the Play

The exposition of "A Doll's House" is made in Ibsen's earlier manner, by means of a conversation between the two old friends, Nora and Mrs. Linden, who have not met in ten years. This is a conventional way of beginning, and the audience knows that it is

being talked at, but as it is getting information all the time, it does not become impatient.

The exciting force is Krogstad's threatening speech to Nora. But since, as far as possible, everything must be objectified on the stage, this threat has a corresponding action. The exciting force is something done as well as something said. Krogstad drops the fatal letter to Helmer into the box. As Nora sees and hears it fall, she cries, "In the letter box: there it lies. Now we are lost!"

Mrs. Linden's fortunes are intertwined with the event as follows: During this winter she finds herself, for the first time in her life, relieved of care. Her mother dies, and her brothers are in business. She is very poor, but free to do as she likes. She sees in the newspaper that Nora's husband has been made manager of a bank, and she decides to go to Christiania and ask for employment, getting Nora to intercede for her. As fate will have it (and fate still has something to do with the working out of plots on the stage), she makes her plea to Nora before Krogstad has made his threat. Then, when Nora appeals to Helmer on behalf of her old friend Christina, Helmer at once thinks of the place which will be vacant after he has thrown Krogstad out; and so he replies that he may be able to manage it.

Then when Nora, in terror, tries to intercede for Krogstad, she finds that she has unwittingly made her own disaster more certain. The destinies of these characters are becoming fatefully intertwined.

Helmer's appointment as manager of the bank, then, is a dramatic event, because it brings about a crisis in the lives of four people, and begins to tie their life lines into a knot.

But it is dramatic for another reason also. It turns or reverses or recoils upon itself, like a crisis in Greek tragedy. It seems the very event that would be likely to bring Nora and Helmer out of their difficulties, giving them a comfortable income, and making it possible for Nora to pay the last installments on her debt. In reality, however, instead of being a fortunate event, it proves most unfortunate and disastrous and tragic. The very irony of fate is in it.

At this point in any play there must be suspense — something to hold up the interest. The play cannot rush on directly from exciting force to climax. So we find that Mrs. Linden, to whom Nora tells everything, offers to help her — to influence Krogstad not to revenge himself upon her. This promise for the moment seems to arrest the action, and avert the calamity entirely. Krogstad offers to get the letter out of the box, or at least to recover it from Helmer before it is read. But there has been a little interval of time, at the end of which Mrs. Linden declares that she has changed her mind — that there must be a full understanding between Nora and Helmer. She says in a later interview with Krogstad, "I have learned more about them since first talking with Nora; they cannot go on like this." So disaster again threatens. Then Krogstad declares, "One thing I can do and at once." He exits, and the audience, being in doubt as to the meaning of his words, is again in that suspense which is so dramatic, and has so much to do with making a good play.

But we are approaching the climax. It is to be a spiritual climax, like that in Hamlet, yet with two marvelous effects, powerful as in Greek tragedy:

First: Reversal or recoil.

Second: Recognition or revelation.

The climax comes when Helmer learns of Nora's forgery. Nora has hoped for that moment, and at the same time has dreaded it. She has hoped, because, in the midst of her tumult of feeling, she realizes that when Helmer learns of her crime, he can, if he will, show the first real proof of devotion he has ever given her. She fears, because she is determined that, if this miracle does happen — if Helmer does offer to take the blame upon himself — she must not allow him to make the sacrifice. She is determined to go away and perhaps commit suicide in order to show the world that she was the forger.

But the wonderful thing does not happen. Indeed, it is the reverse that happens. When Nora says, in the most ironic speech of the play, "You shall not take my guilt upon yourself," it at once appears that Helmer has no intention of shielding her, but is fiercely and cruelly determined upon quite the opposite. He calls her a hypocrite, a liar and a criminal, casts all the blame upon her, reflects upon the memory of her father, and makes no attempt to protect her.

It is interesting to note, by way of contrast, that "The Thunderbolt," Pinero's latest play, furnishes a fine instance of a miracle that really happened. In that play, when Phyllis confesses to her husband that she has destroyed a will, he instantly, without a moment's thought, takes all the blame upon himself, and is ready to face every consequence.

To return: At the point of this reversal, there comes in marvelous guise what the Greeks called recognition, the clearing up of a mistaken identity. Only in this case it is not the discovery of a long lost brother or child. It is a mistaken spiritual identity which is

cleared up. Nora cries, "In that moment it burst upon me that I had been living here these eight years with a strange man."

But before this, the last hope has appeared and disappeared, quite in Greek tragedy manner. Krogstad's second letter comes, returning the promissory note and withdrawing all his threats. There is one breathless moment in which the audience hopes that the disaster is averted. Helmer, overjoyed, exclaims, "I am saved," and assures Nora that he forgives her. But at the sound of that word "forgive" Nora realizes as never before how totally and hopelessly they are missing each other's mental track. Finally she unties the knot of the plot by taking her life into her own hands and departing. It is by far the greatest *dénouement* in modern drama.

The Subtler Devices

Having examined the structure or building of this play, we now turn to those technical qualities, the observation of which is so interesting, and the intelligent appreciation of which adds so much to the pleasure of playgoing.

First, the transitions are made smoothly, so as to carry conviction. Think what the situation was at first, and then what it is at the end. We begin on Christmas eve with — not a happy family in a real home — but a merry family in a doll's house. In fact, the family is rather merrier than it has been for a long time, having just come in for a piece of good fortune. But in three days all is changed. Dire disaster has befallen, and the home is broken up. To accomplish so much in three scenes with any appearance of prob-

ability, any smoothness in the succession of events, is not easy.

In viewing the stage presentation of a great play, it is interesting to notice also with what measure of success the actors solve their difficult problem, that of shading their parts and making them fluent, so that one mood merges naturally and imperceptibly into another. Obviously they can work to good advantage only when the playwright has moved skillfully from point to point, keeping the stage and the actor constantly in mind. The shading of Nora's part in this play is an invigorating trial of skill for the greatest actresses, difficult but not impossible to accomplish.

Then there is dramatic irony, that technical expedient which is as old as the drama itself. Ironic speeches, it will be remembered, are those which have one meaning on the stage, and another, perhaps deeper and more significant, to the audience. In this play we discover some of the finest irony in all dramatic literature.

In the second act, Helmer says to Nora, "Are you trying on your dress?"

It is the masquerade costume; and Nora replies, with bitter meaning, "Yes, yes, I am trying it on. It suits me so well, Torvald."

Then a little later, Helmer says, "Nora, you're dancing as if it were a matter of life and death."

Nora. So it is.

But perhaps the most tragic irony of all is in Helmer's speech in the third act, just before the revelation. "Do you know, Nora, I often wish some danger might threaten you, that I might risk body and soul, and everything, everything, for your dear sake."

To the audience, with its knowledge of Nora's ter-

ror and danger, this speech comes across with mighty force.

The most marvelous and thrilling achievement of all in great drama is the pressure as the climax approaches, and often from that on to the close of the play. When the ending is tragic, the pressure sometimes becomes so powerful as to be almost unbearable. But always when this driving force makes itself felt, the speeches begin to come inevitably, quite of themselves, so that it seems as if anybody might write that part of the play, granted the foregoing scenes.

In "A Doll's House," the whole work appears to be constructed for the benefit of the closing speeches, so that they may be simple, natural, unforced, yet great in import.

Twelve years after the opening night, Ibsen himself testified, "I may almost say that it was for the sake of the last scene that the whole play was written."

Only a few of the lines can be quoted.

Helmer. I would gladly work for you day and night; bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man sacrifices his honor, even for one he loves.

Nora. Millions of women have done so. . . .

Helmer. I have loved you more than all the world.

Nora. You have never loved me. You only thought it amusing to be in love with me.

The whole play drives Nora's speeches home. These lines never fail to startle an audience. There is no time to think in the theater, but the words are always carried away to be pondered indefinitely.

Greater Pleasure in Playgoing

Thus we begin to see what drama can do for us, if we meet it half way. It can give us a sharp sense of

life, make us forget ourselves, kindle our imagination, and expand our whole being in response to the greatness of its art.

We may be enthusiastic over great plays without knowledge of technique. But understanding technical points and all the subtle ways by means of which the dramatist triumphs over the thousand and one difficulties which beset him, we may be even more enthusiastic; and enthusiasm, to return to our opening chapter, is a wonderfully recreating emotion.

It is to make possible some degree of mental and spiritual refreshment in the theater that the study of the art of play-building should always tend.

VII

THE CATASTROPHIC PLAY

Illustrated by Ibsen's "A Doll's House"

THIS term has a portentous and forbidding sound, and one is prompted at the outset to disclaim all responsibility for inventing it. But it seems to be well established in the literature of dramatic criticism and has become too insistent to be ignored.

In approaching the drama of catastrophe it is necessary to turn back to a period about thirty years ago. At that time life was expressing itself but feebly and imperfectly in dramatic form. The old romantic methods seemed to have worn themselves out. The life of the day had become too complex and introspective to formulate itself in plays of the then existing schools. Prose fiction evidently served its purpose better, and the consequence was that for a generation the varied complications and developments of modern life stored themselves away in the novel. We are still too near the period to realize how rich the treasure-house is; but it ill becomes us, even in the present stimulation of interest in what seems almost a new birth of the play, to belittle or cheapen the admirable schools of prose fiction that grew up in the latter days of last century, not merely in Europe, but, we should be proud to add, in our own country.

It is unfortunate, however, that the modern world did not express itself more fully. It is good for life to pour itself abundantly into all the forms of all the arts, for honest art never fails to react in the wholesomest way upon life out of which it springs, and upon human nature from which alone it can obtain its material. So when the realists — for to them should be given the credit — achieved a dramatic form that commended itself even to those who thought most independently, and felt most vehemently, and insisted most strenuously upon the scientific view of life, there was at least one point gained; the drama began to revive.

The Old Form and the New

The new play was of course built upon the old; for absolute beginnings and endings are as rare in art as they are in life. The difference was merely in the way of remodeling and recasting the dramatic material. The simplest kind of imaginary plot will serve as well for illustration as an intricate play, and will take up less space. Suppose, for example, that the material is something like this: A boy runs away from school, goes to the circus, returns home, and is punished. The old method of making a play out of such a story would be to construct five acts as follows:

ACT I. — The boy starts for school. On the way he passes a circus. He is tempted (other *dramatis personæ* being involved) to abandon school for the sake of seeing the show.

ACT II. — A prolonged and eventful struggle with temptation ensues.

ACT III. — The boy finally yields, and squanders his

only quarter to see the circus, which is introduced directly, and is most elaborately and extravagantly staged.

ACT IV. — The boy returns home and practices many deceptions and intrigues to persuade everybody that he went directly to school, and did n't know there was a circus in town.

ACT V. — His guilt is discovered, and he is reprimanded and punished. The play comes to a touching and pathetic close, which involves some innocent character in the misery of retribution.

Nothing in the world was ever more highly ethical and instructive than the catastrophe of the old romantic play. But somehow or other the deepest impression, and the one that persisted longest in the minds of the audience, was not the pathos of repentance and punishment at the close, but the glare and glitter and fascination of the circus.

The time of action of such a play would be prolonged, if possible, by intervals between the acts, and there would be five or more costly and elaborate stage settings. The line of action would be the familiar pyramidal diagram, with a slant up to the climax and then a slant down to the end.

Now the drama of catastrophe takes the same material and recasts it into another shape, so as to leave a different impression upon the minds of the audience. When the curtain rises the circus is over. In most plays of this kind some time has elapsed since there was any circus. Moreover, at the beginning of the play nothing has been found out about the boy's eventful experience. Three, or at most four, acts are then constructed, as follows:

ACT I. — Exposition enough to make the present situation intelligible. No reference at first to the far beginnings of the action. But the boy is evidently concealing something, and there are hints of impending calamity.

ACT II. — Threatened discovery, deception, remorse, great distress of mind.

ACT III. — It comes to light that the boy did run away from school and go to the circus. This revelation, which obviously is not action, but the reminiscence of a previous action, forms the climax of the play. The circus, which is introduced by indirection, has become a tragic memory, greatly embittered, to the former spectators.

ACT IV. — Awful retribution and dire catastrophe. The ending is so depressing that there is no need of pointing any moral at all.

The time of action of such a play can be shortened to a day, or even less, and one stage setting can be made to serve from beginning to end. The line of action is a steep downward slant. The play is merely an elaboration of the catastrophe following upon some previous action which is entirely outside the frame of the picture. The exposition of this action is necessarily distributed throughout the play. Indeed, in one sense, the exposition makes the play.

This, in brief and rather trivial illustration, is the difference between the earlier construction and the later.

The New "Drama of Catastrophe"

Now no play of Ibsen's (unless perhaps "Rosmersholm" be excepted) more completely illustrates the

catastrophic method than "A Doll's House." At the rising of the curtain Nora's forgery, which is the act that makes the play, is of the past — was in fact committed eight years before. The play concerns itself with results merely, and comes to a climax with the discovery of what has been.

But the new form, to repeat, grew out of the old, partly by way of imitation and partly by way of reaction. In "A Doll's House," which is usually considered the first great drama of catastrophe in modern times, we have, as it happens, excellent means of illustrating both the revolt from the earlier form and the imitation of it.

The Revolt from Earlier Forms

It will be recalled that up to the time of writing this play, Ibsen, as far as dramatic technique was concerned, had been much under the influence of the French school. During the six years when he was a kind of stage manager in Bergen, more than half of the one hundred and forty-five plays which he assisted in producing were from the French, and most of them of the Scribe school. The most ardent admirer of Ibsen's creative genius must admit that it was greatly to his advantage, as a young man, to be drilled and strengthened by practice such as this. And what he learned at this period is clearly manifest in the first two acts (and part of the third) of "A Doll's House." For example, the long colloquy between Nora and Mrs. Linden, the old friend whom she had not seen for ten years, is exposition made in the most conventional, even mechanical, fashion. Then, as their reminiscences come to a close, we have the most commonplace use of an exclamation of happiness as a

cue for the entrance of disaster. Nora springs up and cries, "Now my troubles are over! Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to live and be happy!" Just then the doorbell rings, and enter Krogstad!

As to Nora's dance, that has long been considered almost too theatric, too much like an operatic combination of revelry and horror. In fact, the setting of the whole piece is obviously contrived to produce a strong antithetical effect. The Christmas tree, the masquerade ball and the tarantella make a contrasting background for Nora's frenzied anxiety and Rank's despair. Nothing warns us that, in the very midst of this time-honored machinery, there is to be a sudden casting aside of the artifices and accessories of the French school. But finally, last external device of all, Nora takes off her masquerade costume — her doll's dress, as she calls it. When this occurs the third and final act of the play is more than half over, and it cannot be denied that, although Ibsen managed to avoid any conspicuous break in the construction at this point, the line of cleavage is discernible, nevertheless.

From the moment when Nora says to her husband, "You and I have much to say to each other," to the end of the play, to the end, moreover, of all his plays, Ibsen's construction is absolutely his own, and not another's. He uses, in brief, the new art of giving to psychological analysis the most absorbing dramatic interest. He shows the innermost souls of his characters in lightning flashes, with effects of such unexpected revelation that the audience is thrilled as by some wild adventure. He makes changes of thought and feeling exciting and dramatic, without the help of external action.

It is not too much to say that in Nora's final eye-to-

eye talk with Helmer we mark most distinctly the beginning of a new school of dramatic art.

The Imitation of Earlier Forms

It remains merely to show what this new method took from the old by way of imitation.

Most of the plays of the Scribe school are restless in the constant play and interplay of the action. Open "The Ladies' Battle," for instance, at random and observe how many turns there are in the course of events on any one page. It is all clear on the stage, but in reading the play it is really fatiguing to visualize the rapid changes of adventure and to keep in mind the shifting attitudes of the characters toward one another.

Now Ibsen makes these shifts and changes inner instead of outer, mental instead of physical. But his characters are as restless in their incessant spiritual changes as ever the heroes of romance were in their adventures and hair-breadth escapes. The old method had merely struck in, so to speak.

The final scene between Nora and Helmer in "A Doll's House" exactly illustrates the rapid changes of thought and feeling that often so breathlessly succeed one another in plays of the new technique. The listener (one can hardly say the spectator) follows the speakers at a headlong pace, and, if he be not mentally very alert, is in danger of finding himself, at fall of the curtain, quite out of the conversation altogether.

The Spread of the New Form

The drama of catastrophe, then, employs its own peculiar method of recasting the dramatic material, and

makes its adventures inner and spiritual instead of external and objective.

Of the mighty spell that Ibsen cast over dramatic art everywhere, nothing need be said at the present time. Illustrations of the spread of this new form of play will at once abound and multiply in every reader's mind. The drama in France, Russia, Germany, Italy, England and America has, in the last generation, felt the might of Ibsen's influence. There is little danger of overstating it. In sheer power of giving his art an impetus in a new direction, Ibsen stands almost alone among the dramatists of the world.

For good or for ill, the drama of catastrophe in its modern form has, in the thirty years since " A Doll's House " was written, made a place for itself in literature.

Two Common Dangers

In conclusion, it may be added that there are two very common dangers into which the catastrophic play is liable to fall.

Obscurity

First, unless constructed with great skill, it is apt to give the audience an uncomfortable feeling of not getting into the plot as the action unfolds. The modern audience is wonderfully quick and alert, but there is a limit to its mental agility. The dramatist ought always to keep a wholesome fear lest his entire audience, young and old, wise and simple, groundlings and gallery, may not be with him at every step of the way. Sophocles, who in the popular view is Ibsen's prototype, wrote his catastrophic tragedies under favorable auspices, because the myths which furnished his plots

had passed into the very air of Greece. Thus the attention of his great audiences was so economized that the edge of his irony was never blunted nor his dramatic pressure weakened. Even if he had been less scrupulous than he was in safeguarding his effects at every turn, his most suspensive plays could never have baffled or puzzled the slowest-witted spectator.

But the catastrophic play of the present, treating original and inventive material with such prolonged suspense, often obscures the meaning of its plot lines, and uses irony that is not intelligible until its occasion has been left too far behind. Nothing ever justifies such overtaxing of the playgoer's attention; for until human nature is miraculously changed, it will be reasonable to expect a play to carry its interpretation with it through every phase of its development.

This doubtful kind of structure has become so common of late that we seem likely to fall into the error of regarding the play as an enigma to be puzzled out in advance, lest it may not be intelligible on the stage. And, worse still, we are in danger of deluding ourselves with the fancy that this is "study" of dramatic art. When Mr. and Mrs. A. attend a performance of some obscurely retrospective play, and Mrs. A. understands what it is all about, while Mr. A. is dazed and bored, that does not necessarily mean that Mrs. A. is more æsthetic or "temperamental" than Mr. A. Sometimes it merely indicates that Mrs. A. has attacked the play beforehand, while Mr. A. has trusted to a misplaced confidence in the self-interpreting power of any play that is a play. If Mr. A. protests that the reading of a play merely to get the facts in the case is nothing more nor less than a botheration, it must be admitted that he has some reason on his side. It is greatly to

be feared that we shall never arrive at any adequate notion of what it means to study the wonderful art of the drama so long as we are racking our brains over dramatic irony that is liable to be lost at the moment of utterance unless it has previously been explained and diagrammed like an American joke for the benefit of an Englishman. Those who know what it is to watch a great play with unbounded enthusiasm as it unfolds itself upon the stage, then to read it with absorbing delight, and then to see it again with greater delight than ever, are safe not to mistake the enigmatic for the profound.

Weakened Hold on Life

The other danger is that the modern drama, in its imitation of the Ibsenic structure, may lose sight of the fundamental fact that drama is action. We are apt to say that the play of the day is "life," and we are quite right if by that we mean that it has in a great measure rid itself of perversions, misrepresentations and sentimentalisms. But there is a sense in which the retrospective play has almost ceased to be life at all. It has lost its hold on the deed itself, on the act which effectually makes the plot. It merely looks backward upon what once was life. The characters seldom "have it out" among themselves on the stage before the audience. Often they are chiefly occupied in gazing hopelessly upon the ruins of the past. The glorious thrill of ambition and hope and love and courage has died away. And one result of it all is that many of the greatest present-day plays, with their morbidity and negations and general stagnation, are making no appeal to the young. Now, when any art takes

a form that discourages and antagonizes youthful interest and enthusiasm there is sure to be something about it that should give us pause. The most hopeful view regards this phase as passing. Art is long — dramatic art especially — and presently it will begin again to reflect the fullness of life. We were thankful to see romanticism and mock heroism go, but we have faith to believe that romance and heroism are as hard to kill out of the drama as out of life, from which the drama springs.

Cure for False Methods

But the popularizing of this Greek form in modern drama has greatly helped to cure away fraudulent devices and tiresome methods. With its swift directness of movement, it is so difficult for any dramatist to manage that it is like a gymnastic exercise, strengthening and corrective. To see this clearly, perceiving at the same time that the plays themselves are not a final achievement in structure, is as difficult as to get any other unconfused view of things dramatic.

VIII

THE PLAY OF THE DAY

Illustrated by "The Earth"

By James Bernard Fagan

TO illustrate certain developments in the modern drama, this play may be chosen, not as of profound significance or perfect execution, but because it is interesting, full of promise, and typical of the plays of the day, as we see them coming in on the horizon, and of the plays of the morrow as we fancy they may prove to be. The newer plays, of which this is a fair sample, involve a technique which is as yet imperfectly worked out in its modern form, or in its adaptation to the content of the modern play.

In fine, we have here a play with a big enveloping interest, touching the world at large, and inclosing, as a kind of nucleus, a plot whose interest is personal, domestic, and centered in the private lives of a few characters.

First observe that the mere form is nothing new; in fact, until recent years, nearly all famous plays had an enveloping interest which was ample, momentous, affecting a realm, a kingdom, or a whole people. Œdipus was king of Thebes, Hamlet prince of Denmark, Maria Stuart claimed the throne of England, Hernani was a rival of the king of Spain. Even Othello, whose tragic fate after the opening act hangs upon personal issues,

makes his first appearance as the hope of the Venetians in their war against the Turks.

The time of action of these plays was long, the scenes were many and varied, the characters numerous.

About a generation ago, Ibsen created "A Doll's House," which will doubtless be, to the end of time, the typical sex-problem play. Moreover, it proved an epoch-making play, the forerunner of a long line of problematic dramas. Such plays did not and often could not involve large social interests and affairs of state, or directly affect anybody except the *personæ* immediately concerned. But they sprung up all over Europe, surprisingly similar in theme, dealing over and over again with the same problems in the relation of the sexes. Sudermann was at work in Germany, Echegaray in Spain, D'Annunzio in Italy, dramatists without number in France, Pinero, Jones and Shaw in England. For thirty or forty years these plays were produced almost exclusively.

We say we are tired of the theme and of the plays. Nor is it yet wholly apparent what their intellectual trend and moral bearing is likely to be. But it is perfectly clear that silent forces, not to be lightly estimated, were at work to hold the modern play for so long a time to one kind of plot and action.

Another thing is clear. During the thirty or forty years in which Europe produced such plays abundantly and almost exclusively, a wonderful dramatic technique was perfected. These dramas, involving in their very nature few characters, centering themselves inevitably in the home, working out again and again the fortunes and misfortunes of the domestic triangle, favored and made possible an ingenuity, adroitness and economy of ways and means that had never before been possible.

The soliloquy began to disappear; likewise the aside; likewise the superfluous and semi-detached characters who used to wander aimlessly about the stage; likewise the often unnecessary mass scene or stage crowd; likewise many other clumsy devices.

The old modes and fashions, which, if they are not really clumsy, are often unnecessary on the modern enclosed and brilliantly lighted stage, not only began to disappear thirty odd years ago, and kept on disappearing, but they seem to be gone never to return.

It is inconceivable that they are likely ever to be used again. At the same time, it is inconceivable that plays should keep on forever being so small and so centered. Certainly, in our age, that cannot be expected. Ours is a time of social awakening, and since drama is above all else a contemporary art, reflecting the life of its time, spreading new ideas, and quickening all currents of thought, the play of our day must of necessity cease to be wholly personal and individualistic. It must be truly social, involving the causes that people are struggling for and giving their lives for in this wonderful present in which we live. Otherwise it will become wholly effete and ineffectual as a mode of expressing the life of its time.

The difficult question is, how the play of the present, and of the immediate future as it is foreshadowed, can have the social consciousness and at the same time preserve the exquisite technique so carefully worked out in the domestic drama, and how it can adapt itself and its ample themes to the small stage, the proscenium arch and the modern theater in general.

The play which comes bravely to the grapple with plots that grow out of strikes, or labor unions and leagues, or municipal corruption, or frenzied finance,

or prison reform, or immigration laws, or the rule of the political boss, or the press *versus* the public, is from the outset at a disadvantage theatrically, not to say dramatically. For example, the mechanics of business life is too complicated and obscure to be worked out on the stage and made visible to an audience in every part of the house. For another example, political wire-pulling, however exciting it may be in life, is so underhand and deliberate as not easily to be forced to a crisis in the two hours' traffic of the stage.

The question of how vast interests and minutely finished technique can be reconciled is not yet answered; but the problem is in process of solution. Such plays as those of Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Granville Barker, Mr. Patterson, Mr. Sheldon and others are full of timely interest, and on the whole the most stimulating and absorbing drama on the stage.

Mr. George Tyler, who has produced two hundred plays in twenty-five years, many of them, like "The Melting Pot" and "The Fourth Estate," ventures worth making, says, "There are so many vital issues in America which the drama can treat, and this country of ours is such a great seething mining-camp, that it is hard to say no to any interesting experiment."

To be perfectly honest in our estimate, we must admit that these plays have not as yet quite arrived or achieved technically. Perhaps the dramatists of the day and the morrow, obsessed by their tremendous themes, and having a coming-on disposition, underrate the difficulties that confront them. At all events, they have not quite passed the experimental stage. In the inevitable passing of the old and the welcome advent of the new something has been lost. Their plays describe or narrate, where they ought to act. They are

full of sayings instead of doings. That does not dull our interest in them: stimulates it rather. Most of us would go further and more cheerfully any night to see a play of big endeavor than to see the most perfect sex-problem play ever made. But we often realize, in the midst of our enthusiasm, that technically the work is far below that of "The Great Galeoto," or "Magda," or "The Thief."

Now these reflections upon present issues must be good plays, addressed to the eye as well as to the ear; otherwise they might better call themselves metaphysics, or political economy, or moral philosophy, and keep off of the stage altogether. They cannot continue to be merely promising, no matter how interesting the promise is.

In all plays with an enveloping interest the outer and the inner plots must be closely interwoven, so that there is constant action and reaction between them at all critical points. When this is adroitly accomplished, two effects are gained: the inner plot — the tense personal interest — vitalizes the outer plot, holds it down to earth, and makes it dramatic; which abstractions and sociological speculations never are.

The outer plot or setting broadens and deepens and in every way expands the play, making the inner, centered, domestic plot less stereotyped, less hackneyed and commonplace, causing the incidents to take on new meaning and strengthening the dramatic pressure toward the end.

The Play of the Day Illustrated

Such construction is exemplified in Mr. Fagan's play, "The Earth."

The hero is neither a man nor an idea, but a great

London newspaper. The outermost setting or interest of all, the enveloping plot that takes hold on the life of the time, is the relation between the daily press and the public. Inside of this there is a closer setting which is yet not quite the nucleus of the plot — a conflict between Trevena, the cabinet minister who is working to get a Wages Bill into Parliament, and Janion, editor of *The Earth*, who is working through his papers to smash the bill before it comes to its first reading. Then at the center is one of the eternal trios or triangles — the unhappy wife, the lover, and the man who, having by chance discovered their relations, has them in his power. In this case the lover is the cabinet minister, and the man who holds the power is the editor.

These, then, are the three circles or concentric rings of plot: the press and the public conflict; the editor and the cabinet minister conflict over the Wages Bill; and the love-story conflict, endangering Lady Kitty's reputation.

In order to make a play that is stageable and actable, these lines must somehow meet and intertwine at all critical points; for the personal and domestic phase of the plot comes perilously near being worn out and vacuous.

It is a pertinent question, why the old outmoded *partie trois* at all? If the author wished to stage a member of parliament and an editor fighting over a Wages Bill, why not make their conflict the sole motive of the play? With the minor characters and issues naturally involved, it would be interesting and exciting enough, surely.

It is too much to say that this cannot be done; but one suspects that it is impossible, because it never has

been done. No matter what the meaning or intent of a play, no matter how absorbing and vital its thesis — if it has a thesis — it must somehow be held down to earth and fitted to the stage; and the stage is, after all, a very small place.

In this instance, what fixes and concentrates the attention of the audience upon the press and public conflict is its bearing upon the intrigue between Trevena and Lady Killone. And what saves the intrigue from being utterly commonplace is Lady Killone's defiance of Janion near the close of the play, in a speech which marks her plainly as a woman of affairs in the best and most modern sense.

Again following the suggestion in chapter first, a study of this play is begun by giving events from their far beginning, in chronological order, and in story form.

The "Story" of "The Earth"

Fifty years before the play opens, Felix Jansen was born in New York City. His father was German, his mother was Scotch. This, according to Lady Susan of the play, is "a good grasping blend." When he was a child his people migrated to Canada. At seventeen he founded a newspaper in a backwoods town. Later he went to Montreal, where he ran two evening papers of opposite politics, which went for each other so violently that soon everybody in the place was buying one or the other — or perhaps both — in order to get at the real truth!

When Jansen was about thirty, he removed to London, and soon worked up to a position of responsibility on one of the London dailies. Under him on the

paper was a younger man by the name of Trevena, a Cornishman, very different from Jansen — a man of winning personality, fine looking, influential, popular, capable of high enthusiasms, with a Celtic lyrical strain in his nature that made him something of a dreamer.

Seven years before the play opens, Janion (he had by then changed his name) founded or got control of a morning paper called *The Earth*, and ran it on the principle of *making* things happen, *seeing* importance into them, without regard for facts. He put it in this way:

"Before I went into journalism, wives used to ask over the breakfast table, 'Anything in the paper, dear?' and the husband invariably replied, 'Nothing, darling.' Well, I changed all that. If any man says that with one of my papers in front of him, he 's a liar; if he is n't, my editor 's a fool."

On another occasion, storming at the report of a special correspondent, he cried:

"There 's no color, no details, no imagination. He 's got to make you *see* this accident — sling his news at you in spasms — hurl it at you in raw chunks of bleeding humanity. If he can't, let him go and grow flowers somewhere — we 've no use for him. When people open their papers in the morning, let them think the world 's upside down. Take their breath away — hit them in the eye, bang, every day. They like it — it 's a tonic. It makes them think they are jolly lucky they 're alive."

The circulation of this paper reached 2,000,000. As Trevena said, "It 's a rag; but that rag is on every bush in England."

Four years before the play opens, Janion offered a prize for the best forecast of the coming cabinet, and

canvassed the readers of *The Earth.* Trevena got many votes. Janion then pushed him, paragraphed him, wrote leaders about him, and when the cabinet was formed Trevena "got there." As Lady Kitty said, he was like a patent pill, swept to success on a flood of advertisement.

To look backward for a moment: Some years before Janion founded his paper a very beautiful but penniless young Irish girl, the Lady Kitty of the play, married a worthless Irish baronet — or was married to him by her match-making mother. "You brought me," Lord Killone once remarked, "the biggest dowry of Irish pride that ever came into the market; but we can't live on it"; and again, "Strikes me most of us get married when we 're too young to know the value of money."

As for Killone, a hint of what he was may be gained from an exclamation wrung from Janion's secretary — who, like most private secretaries, had learned to refrain from comment: "How *could* Lady Kitty have married that — "

Speaking for herself, Lady Kitty says, as the *dénouement* is drawing on, "My friendship with Mr. Trevena has been the one good thing in my life — yes, in spite of all, the only thing that made me feel I was of any use in the world — a decent member of society. That sounds odd, but it 's true — one of the strange perverse truths that stupid people cannot see."

She was desperately unhappy, but being a brilliant woman, was not entirely without resources in herself. She joined the Woman's Political Union; and when she appears in the play we find that she is on a committee to promote a Wages Bill to put an end to the sweating of women and children in the shops. She

is not, like Chantecler's pheasant hen, a foe to the Idea; and she develops a social conscience.

In the course of her committee work she makes the acquaintance of Trevena, who is to bring the bill into parliament; and each is attracted by what is best in the other.

Then comes about what appears a commonplace *liaison.* Lord and Lady Killone see less and less of each other. Trevena maintains an apartment in London occupied by an old housekeeper, a family pensioner; and he and Lady Kitty spend part of their time there. The author's endeavor is to make it out something a little more interesting than the ordinary story of affinity.

By this time Janion is in control of eighty newspapers in England — two-thirds of all the papers in the country. Sixty of these are unimportant, but by means of the others he has *Janionized* the public press and opinion. Though he poses as an enemy of trusts, he has formed the most pernicious and dangerous kind of trust — a trust of ideas. He proclaims the freedom of the press, and yet by means of his three principal papers he has cornered the voice of public opinion.

Janion is fighting the Wages Bill. He calls it an ill-digested piece of legislative lunacy, and has condemned it before it is presented to parliament. For a month he has staked his reputation that the bill will never see its first reading. It must be smashed, or his reputation will be smashed.

We come now to the opening of the play. With a view to finding out how the government is taking the newspaper campaign against the Wages Bill, Janion has invited Trevena to visit at Arrowleigh Court. It happens rather too coincidentally that Lord Killone is

there also on a wind-raising expedition, and that he has brought Lady Kitty with him. By chance Janion discovers the relation between Trevena and Lady Kitty, and so gains the whip hand over them. This is the exciting force.

Among the characters not already mentioned are: Dickson, Janion's managing director, a man of the same stamp as his chief; Morrish, editor of *The Earth*, a man of refinement, who relucts from much of the work thrust upon him; and Lady Susan Sturrage, society scavenger for Janion's papers.

What is a "Talky" Play?

Before considering structural points, it may be said that this play is often stigmatized as "talky." We are apt to make such criticism of any play in which there is little obvious or external action. But it is evident to any one who watches the stage carefully that this does not describe the talky play. For example, the closing scene of "A Doll's House," in which Nora and Helmer are in colloquy alone. Never was there a scene in any play which presented so little action in the literal sense. The two figures on the stage keep almost perfectly quiet through it all. At one point Helmer starts to rise from his chair, but Nora bids him be seated again. Aside from that there is no movement.

Now nobody was ever known to call that prolonged scene talky. It is as tensely dramatic as the ghost scene in Hamlet or the smothering scene in Othello. The audience sits absorbed, enthralled, spellbound.

But it will be remembered that every speech works directly and powerfully upon the emotions of the audience. The scene is not a stage conversation. There

is nothing literary about it. It is as far as possible from being brilliant, or even quotable. It comes from the heart of the characters on the stage, and appeals to the heart of the audience, every word of it powerfully backed by all that has gone before in the play.

Thus we begin, as Henry James would say, to strike a light in regard to the talky play. A play which converses, however brilliantly or wittily, addressing its conversation to the *minds* of the audience, is talky; and everybody on the stage and in the audience knows that there is something seriously wrong with it, though they may not be clear as to exactly what the trouble is. The audience grows restless. The actors — here is an interesting point — are apt to try to put life and mettle into the scenes by moving about. This is an utterly hopeless attempt, because, if a speech is coldly brilliant and conversational, nobody can make it dramatic by bustling up and down the stage, or walking about, or rising from one chair only to be seated in another for no ostensible reason.

Henry Miller relates that Boucicault once criticised him for crossing the stage during a long speech in one of the Irish dramatist's plays.

"Why did you make that cross?" Boucicault asked.

"To create a sense of action," replied Mr. Miller.

"I want to tell you something," said Boucicault. "If I cannot interest the audience with my pen, you cannot interest them with your feet."

Whenever we are conscious of an aimless, futile moving about on the stage — and we see it too often — it is interesting to give special attention to the colloquy, observing whether it is not deteriorating into conversation, and for that reason making the actors restless.

This play, in the opening scene of its second act, where Janion and Trevena hold forth at great length upon politics and the press, may fairly be called talky; for the speeches are addressed to the mind and not the heart, and no amount of walking about can put feeling into them. But even this long colloquy was popular in England, where political discussions are so common in society that they are tolerated when society is represented on the stage.

Building the Play

Coming now to the play, we observe that the action is dated neither in the past nor in the present, but in the future — *tomorrow*. This takes it at once into the realm of conjecture, where the author can be as speculative and hyperbolical as he chooses. The work borders too closely upon the preposterous to be called high comedy; nor on the other hand can it fairly be called farce. Like many plays of the day, it is something of an experiment in structure.

The scene of Act I is the garden at Arrowleigh Court. It is Whitsunday morning.

First comes an incident skillfully introduced to set the tone of the piece, and put the audience in the right mood.

Enter Stronge, Janion's secretary, followed by a footman who is bringing a telephone, so that Sir Felix, when he returns from church, can sit in the arbor and connect with his office in London. The servant bends down, looking at the telephone plug in the table.

Stronge. What 's the matter, Tupper?

Tupper. A small snail in one of the holes of the plug, sir.

Stronge. Oh, shove it in and smash it! We can't waste time over a snail.

Tupper (shoving in the plug). Yes, sir.

In the following scenes we learn that for several years Lord and Lady Killone have not been on good terms, and that Lady Susan is maliciously watching them. Janion is talked about by his secretary, his sister, and Lady Kitty from their various points of view, so as to stimulate the curiosity of the audience beforehand. Sir Felix then makes what may be called an appropriate telephonic first enter. The telephone bell goes off suddenly in a prolonged peal.

Stronge (lifting the receiver). Yes — yes — he 's just coming. . . . Sir Felix. . . .

Janion comes down the steps.

Presently Janion has a conference with Dickson and Morrish, in which the latter is plainly given to understand that his services as editor of *The Earth* have been unsatisfactory. It develops that his ideals have got into the wrong part of the paper.

Janion. I 'm all for high ideals myself — in their proper place. They 're splendid — inspiring — lift you out of yourself! Stick them into the leader page. Shove your whole heart and soul into them. But don't you let any of that spirit leak out over the rest of my paper.

After Trevena arrives, the audience is informed that Janion means to defeat the Wages Bill. It also learns, through a brief interview between Trevena and Lady Kitty, what their relations have been.

Throughout the act there are sparkles of satiric wit and humor. Interest is maintained by exciting news that comes at intervals over the phone, first of a scandal in London society, and then of an earthquake in

Antigua, both of which Janion disposes of in a few volcanic sentences.

Finally the telephone gives one last peal, and the curtain falls with Janion at the receiver, saying, "Yes — yes — it 's I. (Pause.) But I don't care a damn — it 's advertisement."

The scene of Act II is the library. Janion and Trevena are in conference.

First is indicated with great skill, by means of four brief speeches, the fundamental difference between these two characters, so soon to play opposite each other in desperate conflict.

Janion takes out a fresh box of cigars, and opens it with a formidable-looking dagger. As they begin to smoke he says to Trevena, holding out the dagger, "Like my paper knife?"

Trevena (taking it). It hardly suggests cutting books.

Janion. No. It 's a reformed character. That 's the knife Curley killed those three old maids with at Colchester — you remember the case.

Trevena. Horrible! (Lays the knife on the desk with a suggestion of disgust.)

Then for fifteen or twenty minutes the action is slowed up or blocked by a long discussion concerning a wages board, government non-interference, trades unions and employees, socialism, individualism, etc. With due allowance for the fact that in this part of any play there is apt to be some grading or retardation of the movement toward the climax, this opening scene may justly be criticised as too long and too conversational. It is brilliant, but not drama.

Then Janion excuses himself to speak to Dickson, and after a moment Lady Kitty looks in at the window and

then enters. She reports bad news from Ireland. She and Lord Killone may be forced to live on their estate.

Trevena. If you are taken away to Ireland, do you know what will happen? I shall arrive one morning and say, "Kitty, come away with me; let 's throw up everything and make a bolt."

Lady Killone. Love makes men foolish and women wise. You 're a fighter, a doer; you must be right in the front of actual things. I know quite well that if I let you give up your career for me — in the end I should lose your love.

Then, rather late in the play, and again somewhat coincidentally, comes the exciting force — the incident that brings on the struggle which motives the plot. As Trevena bends over Lady Kitty and kisses her forehead, Janion appears outside the window. He stops, stares at them a moment, and retreats unobserved.

After Trevena has taken leave to return to London, Janion cautiously interviews Lady Susan as to any gossip which may be afloat concerning Lady Kitty. Learning enough to confirm his suspicions, he summons his henchman, Dickson, and sets him promptly to work.

Janion. I want you to take this business in hand at once. If you find there is anything in it, I want *evidence* — reliable, damning evidence, such that, if it were placed in Lord Killone's hands tomorrow, it would enable him to institute immediate proceedings for divorce. You 've just twenty minutes to catch the five train. You get to work on this tonight.

Thus the curtain descends upon suspense which brings on the next act with a rush.

The scene of Act III is Trevena's study in London, on Thursday night. The Wages Bill is to be introduced the next Monday.

The act opens with a few speeches between Trevena and his secretary, when Lady Kitty is announced. On her way home from a dinner party with certain *nouveaux riches*, she has recklessly stopped to give Trevena a description of the gorgeousness and gorging. She declares that when one of the innumerable courses came about served on gold, she longed to say to the servant, "Please, I can't eat any more, but *may* I keep the plate?" As they talk, she falls for a moment into the one poetic strain in all the play — for like many modern plays, this does not pause for sentiment.

"We 're Celts, you and I — you 're Cornish, I 'm Irish — just two wandering Celts, with our home in the air, and our love a dream — a dream that we come to out of the world for rest and happiness. We 'll go on dreaming; we 'll drift in the crowd, and when the crowd brings us together, I shall whisper, 'How is my lover?' and you 'll say, 'Well, when he 's near you.' Don't spoil the dream by thinking of reality that 's out of our reach."

Then, just as Trevena is about to read his speech to her, Janion is announced. Lady Kitty exits into the drawing room, without, as the first-night reviewers observed, taking the usual theatrical precaution to leave behind her a glove or a handkerchief or a fan to betray her presence. As soon as Janion comes in, however, the climax is promptly worked up to, without any artificial help from Lady Kitty's reckless visit. Revelation is part of it, as so often at this point in the unfolding of a plot. Janion has learned the story of Trevena's life for the last three or four years, and has obtained evidence in the form of signed statements; so that Trevena is speedily driven to the wall.

Trevena. You 've struck at me through a woman's good name — and you know I can't let her run the risk of losing it. My hands are tied. You 've got me — what do you want?

It is the sharpest turn in the plot.

Janion. I want the Wages Bill. Either you withdraw the Wages Bill, or I go to Lord Killone.

Trevena. (Stares before him in silence. At last he speaks — brokenly.) Yes — you 've got me. Very well. I shall see the Premier tomorrow. There will have to be a cabinet meeting — some of them are in town. I suppose I shall be able to concoct some kind of explanation. The announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Janion. The announcement will be made in tomorrow's issue of *The Earth.* (Taking a slip of paper from his letter-case and reading.) "*The Earth* is enabled to inform its readers, on the highest authority, that the Wages Bill will not be brought forward this session, and will in all probability ultimately be allowed to drop." I have got to see that my readers get important news before the readers of other papers.

Trevena. Good God! The whole thing to you is nothing but a journalistic scoop!

After Janion exits, Lady Kitty returns for a moment, and though she questions Trevena in vain, she feels that some crisis is upon them, and goes away in great alarm.

The fourth and final act is the most dramatic and unhackneyed of all. The time is the next morning. The place is Janion's editorial office in the East End. Hanging against the bookcase at the back is a contents bill of *The Earth*, containing a single announcement in huge letters: THE WAGES BILL ABANDONED.

Dickson is exulting, and reading from the paper in loud tones, when the chief enters.

Janion's attitude toward the whole affair is hit off at once in a few speeches made in the same spirit in which he closed his stormy interview with Trevena the previous evening.

He orders Dickson to take the bill down, and refuses to discuss the matter, merely because it is *done* with. Then he throws himself tremendously into his next enterprise — a plan to publish an Encyclopædia of pictures in colors, of every conceivable thing on the earth, with the names underneath in the five principal modern languages.

Then follows a farcical interview with the editor of one of his religious papers. Then Trevena calls up on the telephone, to ask when he can see Janion. Before he arrives, Lady Killone's card is brought in. From this point to the *dénouement* we have the most unique scene in the play. Lady Kitty explains that she has seen Trevena that morning; that, refusing to be put off, she has learned what passed the night before; and that she cannot and will not allow Trevena to withdraw the Wages Bill and ruin his career merely to shield her reputation. In the midst of her courageous defiance and Janion's hard, matter-of-fact defense of what he calls his political expedient, Trevena arrives.

The fall of the action is then arrested at two points. A last hope appears for a moment, only to disappear.

Trevena. How did you *get* the information you published? There is the Official Secrets Act, which you seem to have overlooked. They may not order an inquiry, but if they should, you had better be ready with your " story " and evidence.

The editor is startled, and for a breathless moment

the audience expects that the knot of the plot is to be cut at once. But Janion manages to invent a story of a stolen letter, which, Trevena contemptuously assures him, is no worse than the other devices which bolster up the whole business.

Then Lady Kitty puts in a shrewd remark which rouses Janion again, and makes him bluster. She warns Trevena that the desperate expedient of withdrawing the bill will not end this affair.

Lady Killone. You 're tied hand and foot for the rest of your life if you give in now. This is only the beginning; do you think he 'll forget what he knows . . .

Then Trevena rounds on Janion in the bitterest speech of the play.

" Do you think it is n't true — what she said to me? It 's the simple truth. . . . You, the self-styled mouthpiece of a great country that professes the charity of Christ — you who make your filthy profits by *selling* a woman's shame at the street corners in your miserable rags! You 're ghouls — you 're ghouls, I tell you! — feeding on human misery and human frailty and shame. Come away, Kitty — let 's get out of this."

Lady Kitty makes a last appeal to him to contradict the announcement that the bill is withdrawn. Again Trevena declares that he cannot. Then she goes to the end of the desk, and speaks straight across at Janion.

" Very well, then, I know what I have to do. I am going straight from here to the office of the Press Association. I shall dictate the entire story of this intrigue — this political expedient — this blackmail — this — call it what you will. This afternoon the truth — the whole truth — will be in every newspaper in the country — yours, perhaps, excepted."

Trevena. Kitty! You don't mean . . .

Lady Killone. As there 's a God above us, I do mean it! You have a higher duty than any man owes any woman. Your work 's not your own — no, nor your life. It belongs to others, to the hundreds of thousands of others you work for. And you 'd give it up. Why? To save my good name — my reputation; as if any woman's reputation was worth such a sacrifice! Forty — fifty years hence, what will my name matter, so that your work was done? What will it all matter, when history has put the wretched scandal that followed among the little petty things that don't count? . . .

Trevena. Janion, on Monday I introduce the Wages Bill. You can do your worst.

Then comes the reversal.

Janion. One moment, Trevena. I want a word with you. Shut that door, please. (Janion faces Lady Killone with a grim smile.) Lady Killone, I know when I 'm beaten. You 've beaten me — this time. . . . I undertake that the withdrawal of the Wages Bill shall be contradicted in the next editions of all my evening papers. Tomorrow's issue of *The Earth* will, of course, inform its numerous readers of — er — a " regrettable inaccuracy on the part of our informant." (He takes out his letter-case and produces from it a paper.) As for this " political weapon," I have no further use for it. (He gives it to Trevena.) You 're living on a precipice, you two. You 'll fall over soon enough without my pushing you. That 's all. You can go. (He turns away.)

Trevena. Yes, we are going. But a day will come, Janion, when decent men and women will rebel against a tyranny that does not respect their private lives, that knows neither pity nor remorse, and then — you will go.

The Inconclusive Ending

In some such inconclusive fashion as this many plays of the day bring themselves to a close. The modern dramatist seems persuaded that the work of investigation is enough for him to do, and that he ought not to be expected to wind up his plot like a piece of special pleading in court. He is ambitious above all else to open the minds of his audience and stimulate thought, and he fears lest, if he solves all his problems, and answers all questions, the audience may accept the solutions and the answers too hastily, and think no more about it. So he fights shy of his Q. E. D.

The old play often seemed content to close in every sense of the word, hermetically, with all its characters either dead or married. And if its author had a taste for edification and the smooth perversions that administer a falsified moral comfort, it was sure to get the better of him as his last act moved on apace toward that strange finality which is reached on the stage and not in the world.

Neither the reader, in turning the last pages of a play, nor the spectator in watching the final scene in the theater, is apt to realize how difficult it is to make vital drama reach its finale without being everlastingly final, and conclude without being altogether conclusive. While the action is going on, there is always the possibility of making it like life; but when the moment comes to bring it to a close, artificial means must be used. For there are no endings in human experience that correspond to the dropped curtain, the extinguished lights, the deserted theater. Somehow or other,

life goes on and on in eternal sequence. Only plays come to an end.

The new play makes its characters so alive that even the ringing down of an asbestos curtain cannot kill them — or marry them. The audience goes away wondering what is likely to happen next, and speculating upon the situations which have been created and investigated.

The Unhappy Ending

To digress for a moment: It is curious to observe that sometimes the public, facing a new play of the day, protests against the ending because it is "unhappy," when the only trouble seems to be that it is an ending, and hence artificial in comparison with the earlier parts of the play.

Three years ago, when Mr. Patterson's "The Fourth Estate," also a newspaper play, was produced, the audiences could not endure or would not endure the suicide of Wheeler Brand, which formed the original *dénouement*. It proved absolutely necessary to devise some kind of fortunate ending, if the play was to be saved from speedy oblivion.

Now it happened that in the course of the same season Stephen Phillips' "Herod" was presented for the first time in this country. The public seemed quite unaware how calmly it was viewing the tragic catastrophes of that play. When Aristobulus was drowned and Sohemus, mortally wounded, rolled down a flight of brass steps, and Mariamne was poisoned, and Herod passed into a cataleptic trance, the audiences looked on complacently. If anyone had thrills of horror, they seemed to be agreeable thrills.

But such a play as "Herod" is artificial throughout, with a kind of artificiality which, however imaginative and poetic, is unmistakable. And so the old tragic finale fitted on without a break, and nobody cried out against it.

"The Fourth Estate," on the other hand, was very successful realism. The "naturalness" and costly verisimilitude of manager's office and composing room were the outward symbols of the inner spirit of the play. Its original ending seemed unreal just because, being an ending, it demanded more obvious contrivance than the preceding scenes. The makers of the play had apparently succeeded very well in keeping their hands off while the action was evolving; but when the time limit of performance was reached, they were forced to interfere, merely because the play could not go on forever.

And that made all the trouble.

Perhaps in fairness to those dramatists, not a few, who are now striving so earnestly to create life and not the shadow of life upon the stage, we ought always to be fully satisfied when, by a *tour de force*, they succeed in getting a situation vividly presented; for it is easy to understand that there is small chance for a play to be truly realistic after that point has been reached.

Turning toward the Future

At all events, returning to the play chosen for illustration:

To make a play end like "The Earth," on a completed situation, and yet at the same time open it out upon the future toward which the vital play should ever turn its face, is admirable ingenuity in meeting a stubborn dramaturgic difficulty.

IX

HIGH COMEDY
OR
COMEDY OF MANNERS

Illustrated by "Lady Windermere's Fan"

By Oscar Wilde

SURPRISINGLY little has ever been written upon comedy. Freytag, whose work on "The Technique of the Drama," was until recently almost the only one to turn to, ignored comedy completely. As he was a philosophical German, possibly that was providential. In the works of Brander Matthews and William Archer, and in the various collected reviews and criticisms now issued in book form, there are occasional chapters upon this subject; but the authors all seem to make haste to get away from it as quickly as possible. Even when what they say is clever and interesting, they apparently realize that often their distinctions and definitions, however plausible they may sound, are likely to go to pieces in face of a real comedy on a real stage before a real audience.

The one book upon the subject which is most thorough in treatment and most brilliant in style is George Meredith's "Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit." But Meredith, in all his works and ways, is caviar to the general; and it is the general who need to know

about drama. Moreover, this small volume is less valuable than it otherwise would be, because, though published as an essay, it was written as a lecture; and lecture style, being addressed to the ear rather than to the eye, is apt to be artificially heightened, even when the author is not George Meredith.

Comedy is of timely interest, because it is evident that comedic drama of the serious and significant sort is more distinctively the play of the day than tragedy, or the problem play, now somewhat outmoded, or any other dramatic form.

Granville Barker, who is today stimulating advanced thought on the drama in England, considers comedy the play of the moment. "Modern life," he says, "calls for interpretation by comedy; that is, by comedy which shall reflect and clarify, honestly and humorously, the confused life about us." This he calls the normal drama; not the advanced drama, nor the intellectual drama, but the normal play for normal people.

The chief reason why comedy is coming in on the horizon all about us, is because it makes a more intellectual appeal at the moment to the audience in the theater than any other kind of play. True, like all drama, its first and chiefest appeal is to the emotions. In comedy, as in any other kind of play, there must be suspense and tension, which always work upon the feelings. The play that addresses itself to the mind first and most of all, and makes no other appeal, like some of Shaw's stage conversations — well, if it is very brilliant and attractively presented, it may be successful; but it is a doubtful venture, and always will be till human nature is revised and edited into something different from what it is or ever has been.

But the mind can be alert in the theater in a kind

of secondary way, the emotions being engaged at the same time; and comedy is the only play that calls out this instantaneous mental quickness and alertness in the audience. And the present-day audience likes to be so stimulated.

The modern audience is different from that of a generation or two ago, or further in the past. It does not think more deeply, for Shakespeare and Molière always demanded thought; but it is sharper, more closely observant, more responsive to the appeal of new, fresh, stimulating ideas, quicker to make deductions and connections, and in every way wider awake while it is in the theater than the audience of an earlier day.

Now modern comedy is subtle, elusive, brightened by a delicate infused satire, which is different from the interpolated comic scene. It has a distinct intellectual trend. It does not make an audience nearly die laughing, like the comedic plays of the past, but it wakes them up. And the modern audience, being capable of thinking quickly and responding instantaneously, likes to be put to the test in the theater.

Tragedy always so tries the soul while the play is going on that the brain never sets to work until after the performance is over; and farce and melodrama never stimulate thought at all.

"Lady Windermere's Fan" is full of illustrations in point. A few lines taken almost at random from Act III will show this appeal to alertness of mind which is so pleasing to the modern audience, and incidentally will mark the difference between the brilliant speech that is introduced just because it is brilliant, and the speech that not only scintillates on its own account, but pushes the action of the play along at the same time.

William Archer once said that a witty speech in a play should be like a blossom on a laburnum, instead of like a candle on a Christmas tree. That is, it should grow out of the whole structure and not be put on from outside.

The scene is Lord Darlington's rooms. Five men are smoking and talking. One of them is Cecil Graham, young, smart and irrepressible. Another is Lord Augustus Lorton, familiarly known as Tuppy, not too clever — indeed, rather slow and gullible.

In this passage Tuppy is hit off exactly, and as he is an important character, that helps develop the play. Lord Darlington is outlined also, as a dreamer, a theorist, and something of a sentimentalist.

Lord D. What cynics you fellows are!

Cecil G. What is a cynic?

Lord D. A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.

Cecil G. And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an absurd value in everything, and does n't know the market price of any single thing.

Lord D. You always amuse me, Cecil. You talk as if you were a man of experience.

Cecil G. I am.

Lord D. You are far too young!

Cecil G. That is a great error. Experience is a question of instinct about life. I have got it. Tuppy has n't. Experience is the name Tuppy gives to his mistakes. That is all.

One must think alertly to get the points in such rapid colloquy.

Another reason why comedy is the play of the day is that it favors or makes possible the non-ending or indeterminate close — the kind of end which, although

it completes the dramatic design, does so without finality, thus opening and stimulating the minds of the audience, and giving them something to think of in working out the situation. This also the modern audience enjoys.

Neither tragedy nor farce favors the non-ending close. In the nature of things, they must work themselves out to the very end, leaving no room for speculation.

This play furnishes a good illustration of the indeterminate ending, for though it is most dramatic and exciting, we find that after all it does not violently shake the kaleidoscope of events. Lady Windermere never learns that Mrs. Erlynne is her mother. Lord Windermere never discovers that Lady Windermere was on the point of eloping with Lord Darlington. Mrs. Erlynne does one kind act, but is not permanently reformed, and at the end of the play leaves England forever. No violent or far-reaching changes have taken place. The play is merely a *tranche de vie* which the audience may observe and interpret as it chooses.

Now experience and observation are apt to show that exciting events often have a queer way of coming to nothing particular in the end. This is why comedy, favoring the non-ending close, is expressive of so much in life and human nature.

Comedy Defined

If comedy, then, is for any reason or to any extent the play of the moment, it is worth while to define it as far as possible and stake out its boundaries.

How does it differ from farce, for example? That is an old, well-debated question. Moreover, how does

high or serious comedy differ from tragedy? That inquiry has a newer sound.

It has often been said that comedy deals with the possible, the probable even, the credible, the easily conceivable; and that farce, on the other hand, deals with the impossible, the preposterous, the inconceivable and the incredible. It has been said also that comedy elaborates a situation, even a critical or climactic situation — that it is static, stationary, not dependent upon plot; but that farce must be full of incident, with an elaborate and intricate plot, so that something is happening all the time — as much in fact as can be crowded into the length and breadth of the play. It is usually set forth also that the action in farce must be obvious and so to speak physical, not an affair of mental states.

By way of still another distinction, George Meredith says that comedy causes thoughtful laughter; farce (he doubtless means by implication) causing thoughtless laughter.

The trouble with these definitions is, that in the theater, where they should be decisively pointed and emphasized, they are sometimes totally discredited.

But there are a few distinctions that seem absolutely sound as between comedy and farce. Seldom is anything seen on the stage which tends to blur or efface the following differences:

High or serious comedy must be credible and easily conceivable. It cannot deal with, or use for its material, the preposterous or the fantastic or the incredible. Obviously, this is not true of romantic comedy, like Shakespeare's "Tempest"; but that is a different form altogether.

However, although comedy must be credible, it is

not true that farce must use preposterous material. Farce may choose.

Comedy may or may not be full of incident. Usually good comedy is not crowded with happenings. But it need not necessarily work out a mere situation.

Farce must be full of incident and move briskly. Long-drawn-out farce is conceivable; or, rather, it is a bore. When farce begins to move slowly it at once loses its hold upon the audience.

What should be made very plain is, that comedy *may*, from beginning to end, do nothing but work out a situation, leaving affairs to all outward seeming exactly as they were at the beginning, and that comedy is the only kind of drama which can thus prolong a situation and yet be intensely absorbing and dramatically effective.

It is clear that tragedy cannot dwell long upon a crisis, for its highest points are a terrible stress and strain upon the emotions. It would be dangerous to sustain a tragic crisis; in fact, it would be impossible. Human beings cannot endure emotion at the highest point for many moments at a time.

Comedy usually causes thoughtful laughter, but not always. There are often points where the laughter is careless, even in comedy that is all of a kind, never becoming farce for a moment.

Farce always causes thoughtless laughter, stimulating no speculation while the action is going on nor after it comes to an end.

Now, as to the difference between high or serious comedy and tragedy.

When this question is raised, what first comes to mind is the difference in the ending. Tragedy, we say, is drama with a disastrous finale, a heartrending close;

while comedy always has a propitious or fortunate or happy ending.

But we know after a moment's thought that the ending is the least significant detail in any play. No drama in all the world was ever tragic merely because it had a calamitous ending. No play was ever comedic merely because it reached a happy issue.

For an extreme example let us take Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler." Suppose that at the end Lövborg returned to Tesman's house, and Thea gave him the notes of his book, and Brack had nothing to threaten Hedda with, and Hedda did not commit suicide; in other words, suppose that the first three acts are left as they were written, and then the fourth and final act is made over so that it avoids disaster — would the play then be comedy? We see at once that it would not. It is a dark play from the outset, the real tragedy being Hedda's marriage to Tesman, which took place before the action begins.

Tragedy is tragic throughout, with a cloud hanging over it from the first curtain. Tragic incidents are observed and commented upon and made to motive the action and color the whole drama, while whatever is comedic is subdued or passed over lightly. The tragedy is in the whole warp and woof of a really tragic play.

This brings us to a point of interest, namely, the difference between a tragic view and a comedic view of the same dramatic material.

Drama is always made out of an action or an incident or a group of incidents in which life is intense and vigorous. This action or these incidents must be segregated as completely as possible without sacrificing the sense of their place in the world; and then they

must be shown up and commented upon in a dramatic way and thus made into a play.

If the dramatist looks at these incidents in their social aspect, so as to make us see the faults, the foibles, the eccentricities, the peculiarities, the incongruities, the artificialities, the human imperfections, the foolish conceits and absurdities of the characters, subduing all their severer aspects — then the play is comedy. Comedy is always social; loneliness is in itself tragic.

If, on the other hand, the dramatist treats the same set of incidents in such a way as to bring out their sterner side; if fate is allowed to enter; if there is a stern struggle with conscience and a final surrender to revenge or hatred; if it is made apparent that the misfortunes try the very souls of the *dramatis personæ;* if all views of foibles and peculiarities are brief and no small incidents are shown up in an amusing light — then the play is tragedy. And it usually runs to a disastrous end.

If the ridiculous aspects are made to prevail — and ridiculous happenings do get strangely mixed up with the most strenuous events in life — then the play is farce.

If the incidents are allowed to follow one another as by chance and the characters are made to seem mere victims, without conscience or responsibility, then the play is melodrama.

Thus almost any event, or series of events, which is intense and vital enough to be dramatic material, can be used for almost any kind of play, depending on how the dramatist views it and what aspect of life he insists upon and makes much of. The question of atmosphere (actors know what that means), of how the special

phase of life is observed, is what determines the kind of play that is turned out. The material, the mere outline of events, stripped bare of comment and blown clear of atmosphere, is often much the same, for comedy, for tragedy, or what not. It is the dramatist's concept of the situation that determines the form of the play.

Comedy Illustrated

The material used in "Lady Windermere's Fan" is excellent for illustration of the technical points in high comedy. This play employs the familiar social triangle, the husband, the wife, and some one to come between them and for the moment create disharmony and cause a dramatic conflict.

The events which took place before the play begins, and which are worked into the colloquy as it proceeds, are as follows:

Good Dramatic Material

Twenty years before the first curtain rises, there lived in London a young couple who were not well suited to each other. The husband, we infer from what is said in the play (he does not appear), was Puritanic, stern, uncompromising, possibly what might be called uninteresting, and very British.

The young wife, Margaret, was a brilliant woman, audacious, daring, resourceful, clever to a degree, reckless, with just enough character to repent wrongdoing, but not enough to avoid it. They have one child, a daughter, who, to look forward, becomes the heroine of this play, Lady Windermere.

When this child was less than a year old the reck-

less young wife disappeared, and it became known that she had fled to the Continent with a lover. "I prefer living in the South," she explained many years afterward. "London is too full of fogs and serious people. Whether the fogs produce the serious people, or the serious people produce the fogs, I don't know; but the whole thing rather gets on my nerves."

To the husband this was an awful calamity. He made no effort to trace her, allowed her to pass out of his life, and seldom mentioned her name. He gave his child into the care of his older sister, who was even sterner and more Puritanic than he. And for whatever reason, he did one thing of doubtful wisdom; he told the child, as she grew up, that her mother died when she was an infant, and that it caused him great pain to speak of her. He gave the child her mother's picture, a miniature, showing a beautiful, sweet-faced young woman with dark hair. Every night before she said her prayers, Margaret kissed this miniature, feeling that her mother's spirit was ever guarding and guiding her.

Her father died before she was fully grown, and she always believed that his heart was broken at the time of her mother's death.

She continued to live with her uncompromising aunt, who, we are given to understand, was even stricter and sterner than she otherwise would have been, in fear that the girl might have inherited some of her mother's traits.

At the age of nineteen, Margaret married a man of rank and fortune, who is devoted to her and makes her very happy. At the time the play opens they have been married two years and have one child, a son.

In the meantime the mother, the brilliant and reck-

less woman who fled to the Continent with her lover, has been abandoned by the lover, has tired of the life she has been leading, has paid for her sin, as she said, "again and again," and longs for an opportunity to regain her position in society. This social rehabilitation can only be brought about, she realizes, by a marriage with some man of position and means. She is still youthful and brilliant and beautiful, with, as she plainly intimates, the kind of brains, the kind of wit, the kind of courage, that enables a woman to get back. All she needs is opportunity. She knows, to quote her own words, that there are just as many fools in society as there used to be, and she knows how to manage them.

One day she reads in the papers that her daughter, whom she had abandoned without a pang, and whom she remembers merely as a fright in flannel, had married Lord Windermere. She sees her chance and takes it. Returning to London under the name of Mrs. Erlynne, she tells the whole story to Lord Windermere, and threatens to reveal it to Lady Windermere if he does not help her with his name and his influence to get back into society. In fear that the mother's sin and social disgrace may become known to the daughter, who really would be in danger of being killed with the shame of it all, Lord Windermere is willing to do almost anything, in desperation. It is, in point of fact, a blackmailing scheme, but very cleverly and brilliantly carried out. Mrs. Erlynne, reinforced with the money which Lord Windermere pays her in large installments, takes a house in Mayfair, sets up a carriage, and begins to make her way into society. At the opening of the play this has been going on for six months, and all London is talking of the strange infatuation of Lord

Windermere, so unlike anything ever heard of him in all his life before. Lady Windermere hears of it, inevitably, of course — is frantic with jealousy, of course — and the play is ready to begin.

Obviously, this is good material for any kind of play. It not only avoids the hackneyed and the stereotyped, but brings about spontaneously many dramatic scenes and situations, motiving constantly those ironic speeches by means of which the characters dupe and bewilder one another, while they delight the audience. Then it is clear that there will be much inevitable suspense, tension and climactic pressure.

It is not difficult to understand that although we have excellent comedy fashioned out of this plot, almost any other kind of play might be constructed, if the incidents were viewed from a different angle and commented on in a different spirit.

For instance, the materials of tragedy are here. The danger of breaking up a household and wrecking two lives is surely a tragic matter. So then, by taking the serious view of all details from the beginning, by making it clear that the characters are all foredoomed, and by reaching the disastrous ending, which in the play as it stands is so narrowly avoided (such narrow escapes are often made in high comedy), we might easily have tragedy. Only the treatment and the whole view would have to be altered from the first.

As for farce, the materials for that are here too. Imagine, for example, all London society agog because the sedate Lord Windermere, who hitherto has lived above fear and above reproach, is constantly calling upon this brilliant unknown. Imagine Lady Windermere frantic over the scandal. Imagine great excitement and commotion, all working up absurdly to a

dénouement which discovers that, after all, Mrs. Erlynne is Lord Windermere's mother-in-law! If that were done in the farcical manner, the play might be very good farce; only the whole spirit would have to be different from the beginning.

Then it could be made into a distinctively sex play, which it is not. Comedy is seldom distinctively problematic.

To shape a problem play out of it, all that would be necessary would be to make Lord Windermere fall in love with this brilliant and beautiful woman, so strikingly contrasted with his unsophisticated little wife — to make him infatuated with her, and furthermore, to make her fall in love with him, so that she is torn asunder between the alternatives of giving up her lover or destroying her daughter's home. Now, if this were adroitly done with intent to make the audience sympathize all round, and not quite know which side it was on or whose part to take, that would be a problem play.

Finally, it could very easily be treated as melodrama. For that purpose there should be no sharp insight into character — and there is, in the play as it stands, the finest possible differentiation of character. For melodrama, it should be made to appear that everything happened merely by a series of chances or mischances, till in the end dire disaster descended upon everybody like a bolt out of the blue. It is not difficult to imagine melodramatic treatment.

Comedic Use of the Material

Coming now to the play as it is — high comedy. Having shown that the material is not treated as

tragedy, nor as farce, nor as problem play, nor as melodrama, it remains to show just how it is treated, in order that the result may be such very good comedy as we in effect have.

First, we notice that Lady Windermere, in the play as we have it, is made a distinctly comedic character. That is, she has evident limitations which she ought to break over, certain conceits which she ought to get rid of, and certain illusions which are doing her no good in this queer world in which we all live. She is very sweet, very childlike, very innocent. But there is little moral strength in her sweetness, as indeed she finds out to her own dismay before the play is over; her childlikeness is sometimes nothing better than childishness; and her innocence is, as Cayley Drummle would say, that least admirable kind of innocence for men and women who have reached maturity, the kind that is based on ignorance.

We observe further that the whole point of the plot is to show that Lady Windermere's character is changed. Beyond that, little happens in the play. Everything else and everybody else is left pretty much unchanged. From the first, all lines tend toward this comedic effect.

One of Lady Windermere's illusions or delusions she is not responsible for — that connected with her mother. Perhaps it was inevitable that she should be made to believe that her mother was dead; but the cherishing of her mother's miniature, and the delusion that her mother's spirit is her guardian angel, when as a matter of fact her mother abandoned her without a pang, and remembered her always as a fright in flannel — that preposterous delusion, which one hardly knows whether to con-

sider ridiculous or pathetic, might perhaps have been prevented.

But her real weakness is shown in her colloquy with Lord Darlington in the first act. He is much in love with her, and pays her many compliments, and she remonstrates with him.

Lady W. You think I am a Puritan, I suppose. Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I always lived with my father's eldest sister. She was stern to me, but she taught me, what the world is forgetting, the difference between what is right and what is wrong. She allowed of no compromise. I allow none. . . . Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is love. Its purification is sacrifice.

Lord D. I think life is too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

Lady W. If we had hard and fast rules, we should find life much more simple. . . . Why do you talk so trivially about life?

Lord D. Because I think that life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it.

At the close of the act Lord Windermere comes in and asks Lady Windermere to invite Mrs. Erlynne to her birthday party, which is to take place that evening.

Lord W. Won't you help a woman who is trying to get back?

Lady W. No! If a woman really repents, she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin.

Whether Lady Windermere is wholly right in such lines as these, or wholly wrong, or partly right and partly wrong, does not for the moment matter. The

point to be noted is that she is speaking artificially, insincerely, from the lip only.

At the opening of the fourth act we find Lady Windermere in soliloquy.

Lady W. There is a bitter irony in things, a bitter irony in the way we talk of good and bad women. Oh, what a lesson! . . . I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad, as though there were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. . . . There is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand. To shut one's eyes to half of life that one may live securely, is as though one blinded oneself that one might walk with more safety in a land of pit and precipice. . . .

She has become more sincere, more honest with herself, less artificial. High comedy has reached one of its most distinctive and effective culminations.

There is a sharp and dramatic antithesis between the two most important women in this play. Lady Windermere is a good woman with the possibility of wrong in her nature, partly because she is not overstrong, and partly because she goes about with her head in the clouds. Mrs. Erlynne is what the world calls a bad woman, because at a critical moment in her youth she made the lower choice instead of the higher. But she has the possibility of good in her, since she is always honest with herself and is capable of the utmost self-sacrifice and unselfishness. This she proves when, in a crisis involving another's safety and good name, she instantly, without a moment's thought of

herself, makes a difficult higher choice and then abides by her impulsive action, though it wrecks all her hopes of "getting back."

The Setting

Before outlining the play in full, we may observe how the atmosphere is created.

It is important to get a distinct impression of the setting of this play, not only because it helps to understand the action as it goes forward, but because it shows just what a stupid, vapid, hard and worldly kind of society Mrs. Erlynne eloped out of twenty years before the play opens. The creation of atmosphere here is absolutely a stroke of genius; or better still, many adroit strokes of genius.

First should be mentioned Lady Berwick and her ingenuous young daughter, Agatha, who has just come out. Ever since the play first saw the light, twenty years ago, everybody who knows it has laughed over Agatha, who says not one word throughout the play but "Yes, Mamma," ending with the climactic answer which she makes when her mother asks her what she said to the rich Australian's proposal. That answer is, "Yes, Mamma." And somehow, one constantly feels that Agatha is less ingenuous than she appears.

In the first act, Agatha comes with her mother to call upon Lady Windermere.

As the Duchess is about to repeat the rumors in society regarding Lord Windermere, she wishes Agatha to be out of hearing. Hence ensues the following colloquy:

Duchess of B. Agatha, dear!

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. Will you go and look over the photograph album that I see there?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. Dear girl! She is so fond of photographs of Switzerland. Such a pure taste, I think.

As the gossip proceeds:

Duchess of B. Agatha, dear!

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. Will you go out on the terrace and look at the sunset?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. Sweet girl! So devoted to sunsets! Shows such refinement of feeling, does it not? After all, there 's nothing like nature, is there?

Then, at the beginning of the second act:

Duchess of B. Mr. Hopper is very late. You have kept those five dances for him, Agatha?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. The last two dances you must pass on the terrace with Mr. Hopper. (Enter Mr. Hopper.)

Hopper. I should like to dance with Lady Agatha, Duchess.

Duchess of B. Well, I hope she has a dance left. Have you got a dance left, Agatha?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. The next one?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

When Agatha and Mr. Hopper come in from the terrace:

Duchess of B. Agatha, dear!

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. Did Mr. Hopper definitely —

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. And what answer did you give him, dear child?

Agatha. Yes, Mamma.

Duchess of B. My dear one! You always say the right thing.

Possibly Mrs. Erlynne was disposed of in just such a way by an ambitious mother. If so, it cannot be thought strange that she took her marriage a shade less seriously than if she had been allowed to act and speak like a human being. The *mariage de convenance* is responsible for a great deal; and it is not indigenous to Europe.

A further atmospheric effect, even more trivial, is created in the second act. The scene is the ball room, and Lady Windermere's birthday party is going on. This is always a difficult kind of scene to manage. In fact, it is said that a ball is as hard to stage as a battle. In this case we see merely the part of the drawing room where the guests are received. The ball room opens out on one side, and an illuminated terrace on the other. By way of hitting off the style of conversation prevalent at a London crush — or a crush anywhere else, for the matter of that — and hitting it off in a half dozen short speeches, taking only two or three minutes of time, could anything be better than this?

Enter Mr. Dumby, furnished with one serviceable remark.

Mr. Dumby. Good evening, Lady Stutfield. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season.

Lady S. I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It 's been a delightful season, has n't it?

Mr. Dumby. Quite delightful! Good evening,

Duchess. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season.

Duchess of B. I suppose so, Mr. Dumby. It has been a very dull season, has n't it?

Mr. Dumby. Dreadfully dull! Dreadfully dull!

Mrs. Cowper-Cowper. Good evening, Mr. Dumby. I suppose this will be the last ball of the season?

Mr. Dumby. Oh, I think not. There 'll probably be two more.

At the close of the second act Lord Darlington makes a speech, much more serious than these, which also helps to create the atmosphere. Lady Windermere, observing the attentions which her husband is paying to Mrs. Erlynne, has become frantic with jealousy, and Lord Darlington, who is about to leave London that night, urges her, in one of the most dramatic scenes in the play, to fly with him.

Lord Darlington. You once said you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Be brave! Be yourself!

Lady Windermere. I am afraid of being myself. Let me think! Let me wait! My husband may return to me.

Lord Darlington. And you would take him back! You are not what I thought you were. You are just the same as every other woman. You would stand anything rather than face the censure of a world, whose praise you would despise. In a week you will be driving with this woman in the Park. She will be your constant guest — your dearest friend. You would endure anything rather than break with one blow this monstrous tie. You are right. You have no courage; none!

By means of these three brief scenes, two of them

merely trivial, and the last one very serious, the atmosphere is created. The spectator in the theater sometimes speaks of atmosphere artificially, but to the actor of experience and high ideals it is something real and tangible.

Building the Play

Coming now to consider the play more minutely: The name is well chosen. The fan is simply one of the properties, involving from beginning to end occasional important stage business. The best thing about the name is that, besides being truthful and significant, it plainly indicates comedy. Tragedy could not well be built around a fan. And on the whole, a clear indication of the style of the play is desirable, rather than otherwise, in the name.

The date is the time of writing, twenty years ago.

The length of the time of action is from five o'clock one afternoon to half-past one the next afternoon — less than twenty-four hours. In this respect the play is very modern.

There are three stage sets, elaborate and costly.

There are sixteen characters, including two servants. This is economical, remarkably so considering that the London season is on, and the setting of the play is very social. To give an impression of such extensive social life with so few characters is a marked case of skill in overcoming difficulties.

In Act I Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington are discovered in the morning room of Lord Windermere's house. Lord Darlington takes up a fan and admires it. She says, "It is my husband's birthday present to me. It has my name on it." He pays her many com-

pliments. She remonstrates with him. Finally he replies with the famous *mot d'esprit* which is always quoted whenever this play is mentioned:

"I can resist everything except temptation."

Enter the Duchess of Berwick and Agatha. Presently, exit Lord Darlington. The Duchess of Berwick, being a kind friend of Lady Windermere's, rehearses to her the scandal that is rife in London in regard to Lord Windermere.

Duchess of B. It 's quite true, my dear. The whole of London knows it. That 's why I felt it was better to come and talk to you, and advise you to take Windermere away at once on a holiday, where he will have something to amuse him, and where you can watch him all day long. I assure you, my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married, I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. Though I am bound to say he never gave away any large sums of money to anybody. He is far too high principled for that.

Lady Windermere is left in great distress of mind. Not knowing what else to do, she goes to her husband's desk and examines his bank book. Finding no record of money paid to Mrs. Erlynne, she gives a sigh of relief. But as she returns the book, she discovers another, which is locked or sealed. She tears off the cover and finds record of many hundreds of pounds paid to Mrs. Erlynne.

Enter Lord Windermere. She accuses him; he denies that anything is wrong, and then takes this most inopportune moment to beg Lady Windermere to invite Mrs. Erlynne for that evening. She refuses; and then he himself sends a note.

Lady Windermere. If that woman crosses my threshold, I shall strike her across the face with my fan. (Exit.)

Lord Windermere. I dare not tell her who this woman is. The shame would kill her.

This is the only serious act-ending in the play.

Act II takes place the same night, while the birthday party is in progress. Being broken up into fleeting scenes and colloquies, it is difficult to describe.

Enter, first the Duchess of Berwick and Agatha; then the rich Australian, Mr. Hopper; then Mr. Dumby with his one serviceable remark. There is a brief scene between Lord Augustus Lorton and Lord Windermere, in which Lord Augustus inquires in regard to Mrs. Erlynne's social standing. Lord Windermere makes no comment, except to say that she is coming to the party. Lord Augustus exclaims, "Why did n't you tell me that before? It would have saved me a heap of worry."

Then Mrs. Erlynne makes a striking entrance, looking, as one of the guests maliciously remarks, like an *édition de luxe* of a wicked French novel, meant for the English market. Lady Windermere drops her fan in agitation. Mrs. Erlynne recovers it, and restores it to her.

This is a great scene, because it is necessary for Mrs. Erlynne to do and say just the right thing, to avoid self-consciousness, and to carry everything off quickly, lightly, gracefully, and without effort.

She asks Cecil Graham to introduce her to his aunt, Lady Jedburgh, an elderly dowager; and on being presented, makes one of her most politic speeches.

Mrs. Erlynne. So pleased to meet you, Lady Jedburgh. Your nephew and I are great friends. I am

so much interested in his political career. I think he is sure to be a wonderful success. He thinks like a Tory, and talks like a Radical, and that is so important nowadays. He is such a brilliant talker, too. But we all know from whom he inherits that. Lord Allandale was saying to me only yesterday in the Park that Mr. Graham talks almost as well as his aunt.

Then she passes on, observing what a bore it is to be civil to these old dowagers. And we find, before the end of the act, that Lady Jedburgh has invited Mrs. Erlynne to luncheon the next day, *to meet the Bishop!*

Mrs. Erlynne takes frequent occasion to be seen in confidential conversation with Lord Windermere. Lady Windermere becomes more and more jealous. Lord Windermere tries to find opportunity to speak with her, but she avoids him. Lord Darlington then makes his plea to Lady Windermere to leave London with him that night. She refuses. He bids her good-by, and exits. Then comes a brief scene in which Lord Augustus proposes to Mrs. Erlynne, who puts him off, telling him she will give him her answer next morning. Then follows a scene in which Mrs. Erlynne demands a settlement from Lord Windermere. This, being hard and worldly, is a cue for the next scene, in which Mrs. Erlynne discovers that Lady Windermere has forsaken her home, leaving behind her a letter addressed to Lord Windermere. This letter Mrs. Erlynne opens, and then falls into a soliloquy, which recalls the great climax in "Ghosts."

Mrs. Erlynne. Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! and how bitterly I have been punished for it! No; my punishment, my real punishment, is tonight, is now!

Mrs. Erlynne then reports to Lord Windermere that

his wife, being very tired, has gone to her room and does not wish to be disturbed. (Exit Lord Windermere. . . . Enter Tuppy.)

Mrs. Erlynne. Lord Augustus, listen to me. You are to take Windermere to your club at once and keep him there as long as possible Do you understand?

Lord A. But you said you wished me to keep early hours.

Mrs. Erlynne. Do what I tell you! Do what I tell you!

Lord A. And my reward?

Mrs. Erlynne. Your reward! Oh, ask me that tomorrow. But don't let Windermere out of your sight tonight. If you do I will never forgive you. I will never speak to you again. I 'll have nothing to do with you. Remember you are to keep Windermere at your club, and don't let him come back tonight. (Exit.)

Lord A. Well, really, I might be her husband already. Positively I might.

This ending is noticeable for two reasons: first, because it is humorous, as a comedy act-ending generally should be, no matter how serious the act as a whole. And then, since it indicates that Mrs. Erlynne intends to follow Lady Windermere and bring her home if possible, it sends the curtain down upon dramatic suspense.

In Act III we find ourselves in Lord Darlington's rooms. Lady Windermere is alone, soliloquizing in a speech so long as to mark the play not distinctly modern. From it we gather that she is irresolute and, above all, terrified. Enter Mrs. Erlynne. Then follows the spiritual climax of the play. Mrs. Erlynne, in an impassioned speech, orders Lady Windermere to return

to her home, to her husband, and above all to her child, saying, "If he was harsh to you, you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you, your place is with your child." At last Lady Windermere, holding out her hands helplessly, cries, "Take me home! Take me home!"

At this point we feel the mysticism so common in the modern play. It is evident that Lady Windermere is conscious of a dim, overshadowing, mysterious influence which she must obey. This strange spell, inexplicable to her, but which the audience knows to be maternal, controls her to the end of the play.

Just as they are about to leave, voices are heard outside. They are both panic struck, but Mrs. Erlynne keeps her head. She bids Lady Windermere hide behind the heavy window curtains near the entrance door, so that she can make her escape if opportunity offers. Mrs. Erlynne herself exits into the inner room. The birthday fan is left on the sofa.

Enter Lord Darlington, Lord Windermere, Lord Augustus, Mr. Dumby and Cecil Graham. It develops that Tuppy, obedient to orders, has persuaded Lord Windermere to prolong the evening after the club closed. There are ten or fifteen minutes of the brilliant conversation in which the play abounds, when Cecil Graham, spying the fan, exhibits it to Lord Augustus as rather a joke on their romantic host. Then, when Lord Windermere says he really must be going, Tuppy seeks to detain him by showing the trophy over which they are laughing. Lord Windermere, instantly recognizing the fan, rounds upon Darlington, asking how it came there, demanding an explanation and threatening to search the rooms. Darlington,

surmising that Lady Windermere is somewhere concealed, strives excitedly to prevent the search. In the midst of the commotion, Mrs. Erlynne, who has overheard the threat and who fears for Lady Windermere, opens the door and calmly stands before them all. As they start and turn in her direction, Lady Windermere slips from behind the curtains and glides from the room.

Mrs. Erlynne (to Lord Windermere). I am afraid I took one of your wife's fans in mistake for my own when I was leaving your house last night. I am so sorry. (Lord Windermere looks at her in contempt. Lord Darlington in mingled astonishment and anger. Lord Augustus turns away.)

The final act is one of the best in modern comedy. Seldom, indeed, after the climaxes are left behind, is the last act brought on with so much dramatic uncertainty. The time is the next day; the scene, as in the first act, Lady Windermere's morning room.

It is clear that Lady Windermere must be in fearful doubt as to what happened in Lord Darlington's room after she made her escape. It is equally clear that Lord Windermere must be terrified lest Mrs. Erlynne, in desperation, may reveal herself to her daughter. It is clear, also, that Mrs. Erlynne must be fearful lest Lady Windermere may spoil everything by some hysterical confession to Lord Windermere. So great is the tension that ironic speeches, of a kind rarely found near the end of a play, come thick and fast.

When the curtain rises, Lady Windermere is alone. As Lord Windermere enters she starts in alarm; but he comes in quite as usual, and suggests going down to the country for a rest. Lady Windermere replies that she must see Mrs. Erlynne before leaving town.

Lord Windermere tries to dissuade her, and finally exclaims, "Margaret, if you knew where Mrs. Erlynne went last night after she left this house, you would not sit in the same room with her."

To the consternation of both, Mrs. Erlynne is announced. Her entrance, as always throughout the play, is dramatic. She comes in unconcernedly, returns the fan, and announces that she is leaving England permanently to live abroad. But she asks as a favor that she may take with her a photograph of Lady Windermere and her child.

Lady Windermere exits to find the picture. Then Lord Windermere, exasperated beyond endurance at Mrs. Erlynne's triviality, threatens to tell his wife everything. Mrs. Erlynne begs, even commands him to hold his tongue forever.

Mrs. Erlynne. If I said to you that I cared for her, perhaps loved her even — you would sneer at me, would n't you?

Lord Windermere. I should feel it was not true. A mother's love means devotion, unselfishness, sacrifice. What could you know of such things?

Then there is a brief interview between the two women alone, in which Lady Windermere cries, "You saved me last night, but I can't let you think that I am going to accept this sacrifice. It is too great. I am going to tell my husband everything. It is my duty."

Mrs. Erlynne pledges her never to reveal the events of the previous evening, and Lady Windermere, mysteriously influenced as before, gives her word, adding the most bitterly ironic speech of all.

"Only once in my life I have forgotten my own mother — that was last night. Oh, if I had remembered her, I should not have been so foolish, so wicked."

This brings the play to an end, except for the inevitable comedic tag, especially necessary after an act that has so closely bordered on tragedy.

Lord Augustus comes in for a morning call, starts at sight of Mrs. Erlynne and greets her coldly. Mrs. Erlynne asks him to see her to her carriage, gives him the fatal fan to carry (she has asked to be allowed to keep it) and goes out airily and gracefully.

After a few moments, Lord Augustus returns to make the following preposterous speech:

" Windermere, she has explained everything! (Final consternation of Lord and Lady Windermere.) We all wronged her immensely. It was entirely for my sake she went to Darlington's rooms. Fact is, she wanted to put me out of suspense, and being told I had gone on, followed — naturally — frightened when she heard a lot of men coming in — retired to the other room — I assure you, most gratifying to me, the whole thing. We all behaved brutally to her. She is just the woman for me. Suits me down to the ground. All the condition she makes is that we live out of England. . . ."

Comedy well Exemplified

If the description of high comedy or comedy of manners worked out in the opening pages of this chapter is in any degree adequate, then " Lady Windermere's Fan " may fairly be considered to exemplify that rare and difficult species of play. For it elaborates a conceivable situation, treats of social foibles and artificialities, stimulates thought by constantly recurring brilliant lines, and succeeds in completing its dramatic design by means of a non-ending or indeterminate close.

Molière the Model

In taking leave of the subject, it need hardly be said that always, for comedy of manners, Molière is the model. Nothing is more obvious than that pure, unmixed comedy, shading into no other form, is more easily French than English. Our best high comedy traces to "Le Misanthrope" rather than to "Much Ado" or "Twelfth Night." And the reasons are not far to seek.

When Molière wrote "Le Misanthrope," he had not to orient himself anew to get into a more favorable atmosphere. Paris was the only place and the best place for the entire action of his play. Then, Parisians, without any admixture of foreigners or natives from far or near, were quite as inevitably his characters. The salon in Célimène's house was an all-sufficient setting for his five acts. Having conceived the misanthrope Alceste, the rational optimist Philinte as his foil, the poetaster Oronte to write the bad verses, the brilliant Célimène to keep the school for scandal and be the undoing of her melancholy lover, and a few other characters, among them bores, gossips and tuft-hunters, to create the impression of a lively social world, it was necessary for him to do little more, in rounding his play to completion, than to make them all talk interminably. He was not tempted to borrow a plot or any part of one, because the perfectly created situation was, as always in high comedy, the strongest effect he could hope to produce. He wrought the comedic quality into the very warp and woof of the conversation, instead of setting it off in detached comic scenes. So the whole play could be unified, polished and finished to a high degree of dramatic perfection.

Shakespeare's courtliest and most elegant comedy is "Much Ado," but the interrupted marriage brings it very close to tragedy, while the comic town watch, so preposterously transplanted from London to Messina, gives it a farcical side. Then Shakespeare, after the fashion of his time, neither kept the play contentedly in England nor strove to perfect its foreign setting, but compromised by making his Spaniards partly and sometimes wholly British. The scenery is both outdoors and indoors — a hall, a street, a garden, a prison and a cathedral. The plot is complicated, the dramatic effects exceedingly varied, the comedic situations few and scattered.

Now Benedick and Beatrice, by themselves, are gloriously comedic, and an Englishman might well challenge a Frenchman to match Benedick's best soliloquies with anything from Molière, or to parallel the love scene of the fourth act, strengthened by its outbursts of generous anger, with anything from all the dramas of France.

But if a Frenchman should criticise the play as being an inconceivable mixture of the English and the Spanish, the inventive and the borrowed, prose and verse, tragedy, comedy and farce, it would not seem strange from his point of view.

For high comedy, Molière and not Shakespeare nor any other, is the model.

La Bonne Comédie

Such a play as "Lady Windermere's Fan" might have been the theme of some of the lines to "La Bonne Comédie," recently written by Austin Dobson.

It lashes the vicious, it laughs at the fool,
And it brings all the prigs and pretenders to school.

. . . . . .

Its thrust, like a rapier's, though cutting, is clean,
And it pricks affectation all over the scene.

. . . . . .

Its mission is neither to praise nor to blame;
Its weapon is ridicule; Folly, its game.

. . . . . .

It clears out the cobwebs, it freshens the air;
And it treads in the steps of its master, Molière!

X

THE UNITIES IN THE MODERN PLAY

Illustrated by "The Servant in the House"

By Charles Rann Kennedy

A STRICT observance of unity of time and place has become surprisingly popular of late, and has been forced, most disastrously in some cases, upon plays that are anything but Greek in spirit. After all, unity of action is the only one of the classic three that really matters; and that may be of various kinds. Greek unity of action meant a oneness of the whole, based on simplicity. With this, unity of time and place could be easily combined. In the romantic schools, unity of action meant another kind of oneness, worked out of the utmost complexity, in which were mingled old materials and new, the tragic and the comic, the present and the past, the native and the foreign. These schools very naturally threw to the winds all considerations of unity in time and place.

Modern realism, especially in the drama of catastrophe, has returned in a measure to the Greek simplicity. But it is hardly worth while to force even an uncomplicated plot to work itself out in a few hours, and without change of scene, when a little more time and one or two changes of place would make the wheels move much more easily. The long arm of coincidence

has of late been worked very hard in the interest of that violent compression of time and strict limitation of space which has so unaccountably commended itself to the playwright of today.

"The Servant in the House" is sufficiently Greek in spirit to make the preservation of the unities effective and unlaborious. It would be idle to line it up with a Greek tragedy, even if it were possible to do so; but it is quite worth while to look at it from the classic standpoint, because then only does the admirable unity of its action become apparent.

Two devices were used in Greek plays that have long since disappeared from dramatic art. One was the *deus ex machina* — the god from the machine; the other was the chorus, with its leader or spokesman. The machine was a kind of crane that swung the god out over the heads of the actors so that he seemed to speak from the heavens. It was always when the plot had tied itself into a tight knot that the god or gods appeared in the empyrean, and cut the knot instead of leaving it to disentangle itself. This declaring the sequel by supernatural knowledge and will was considered a somewhat undramatic device; but it is not at all to criticise the present play that the resemblance is indicated.

Manson does not suddenly appear — he is on the stage when the curtain rises; but the peremptory assertion of his supernatural power in the middle of the fourth act, and the authority with which he turns the action at the climactic point, are suggestive of this Greek expedient. The plot is taken out of the hands of mere human beings, and driven to its conclusion by divine agency.

The Greek chorus fulfilled a very different function.

It formed a kind of link between the audience and the actors. It was in the play and yet out of the play, of the play and yet not of it. It was allied to the spectators by being made to say what they would have said if they had made comments as the play went on. It was the audience thinking aloud, and meeting the various incidents with just the changes of feeling that the play was meant to cause in the spectators.

What allied the chorus to the actors was that to it the protagonist and the antagonist soliloquized and made confidences. And the chorus in turn helped the actors, though never by direct interference.

Manson may be viewed from this very different standpoint also, for he plays something like the part of a chorus, or the leader of it. One thing that makes the play popular is that the Servant is continually making comments and reflections which the audience has in mind and would take satisfaction in uttering if it were allowed to speak.

Manson completes the resemblance by being the confidant and helper of each of the characters in turn; first of Robert, then of Mary, then of the vicar, and finally of the vicar's wife. He makes common cause even with the page boy, and leads on the Bishop of Lancashire to reveal himself in mistaken confidence.

The correspondence to the classic form is in no detail very close, and should not be overstated; but it is important to observe that Manson, controlling as is his part in the play, cannot fairly be considered the protagonist. The real hero is a struggling, striving human being — the vicar; and the antagonist who baffles him and obstructs his highest endeavors is his wife.

It is perhaps because even the suggestion of the

reincarnation of Christ upon the stage is startling and arresting that Manson is so often accounted the hero, when, as a matter of fact, he is neither more nor less than hero, but something quite different.

The Human Interest

The purely human interest in the play is of high dramatic value. We may realize how high by using a kind of eliminating process and proving to our satisfaction that nothing else would do. There is, as in most plays, the desirability of using some kind of love interest. Would you, to meet this necessity, have such motives as jealousy, unfaithfulness, revenge? Would you make use of a problem play motive? All these seem out of harmony with the rest of the play. There is great skill in surmounting this obstacle, because the conflict between the vicar and his wife is not only a way out of the difficulty, but a fine device with real dramatic interest and the charm of originality. The devoted wife — unselfish, too, in a sense — who hinders her husband from being honest with himself and reaching his own highest level, is all too frequently found in life, though she has not often as yet made her way into literature. In this play she works the action up to several impressive crises. Indeed, the real climax is not the casting out of the Bishop of Lancashire, but rather the vicar's challenge to his wife and her desperate reply:

"It is God and I against you, Martha."

"God and I against you, William."

And perhaps even Manson's sublime description of the church triumphant is no more memorable than the vicar's speech beginning, "Love is a spirit of many shapes and shadows."

Unity in Simplicity

Recognizing then that Manson is in one sense serenely detached from the plot, and that the conflict between the vicar and his wife makes the action of the play, the Greek oneness of the whole becomes obvious; because the fate of Robert and Mary hangs so very closely upon that of the vicar and Martha. No sooner does the vicar assert his truest and best self in spite of his wife, than he is in the greatest haste to acknowledge his brother, and restore the child to her father. Here then we have five of the seven characters drawn into close and beautiful unity. There remain only the Bishop of Lancashire and Roger, the former to reenforce the worldly-minded wife against her husband, and the latter to take the one utility part in the play. It is unity in simplicity, based on the fundamental relationships of life — those of husband and wife, and parent and child.

In unity of time this play out-Greeks the Greek, for instead of stretching from sun to sun, it is shortened almost to the time of performance on the stage. Yet the effect is sufficiently leisurely. Indeed, critics have not been wanting to advise omitting certain speeches and abbreviating some of the pauses on the stage.

The unity of place needs little comment. Much is gained by centering the attention without disturbance, and nothing apparently is lost.

XI

THE SOLILOQUY IN THE MODERN PLAY

WHENEVER one of the characters in a play falls into reminiscence or narrates an occurrence or an experience at length, the epic form may be said to appear or reappear in the midst of the dramatic. In other words, a certain part or piece of the story out of which the play is made has escaped the dramatist's remodeling and transforming touch and retained its original narrative form.

Again, whenever a character in a play impulsively cries aloud in solitude, especially if his speech be highly emotional, the lyric element becomes manifest. That is, a certain phase of feeling or thought that cannot otherwise be made clear, is recited directly at the audience in the form of soliloquy, a stage convention which is in itself admittedly dangerous to the artistic illusion.

On the whole, the modern drama seems to be struggling to separate itself from both these older forms. The epic or narrative element began to disappear first, and was not very difficult to get rid of. Many long, indirect speeches are now dropped from the older plays without being greatly missed. An illustration may be found in Racine's "Phèdre," a drama that is in its way of such perfect workmanship that neither actor nor stage manager is much tempted to meddle with it. Theramène recounts the death of Hippolyte in a long

messenger speech of seventy-three hexameters. Bernhardt's version cuts out all but two lines of this brilliant piece of declamation — which is so insecurely attached to the body of the play that the action easily rounds to a conclusion without it. Most of the Elizabethan plays, the form of which has been graphically described as sprawling, are greatly advantaged by having long narrative and descriptive speeches omitted or lopped off. And when the playwright of today holds himself to the deliberate purpose of conveying all necessary information to the audience without anywhere blockading the action by putting in a story, he often succeeds very well. Ingenuity and adroitness are chiefly needed; but these qualities are not so hard to cultivate as some others. Examine a modern play and observe how few speeches run over two hundred words. It is not merely that long harangues are broken up by the cheap device of ejecting into them questions and exclamations and expressions of interest from without; the whole story-telling expedient seems to have been dispensed with.

The soliloquy, however, is a different matter. It is not easy to drop a soliloquy out of any good play without causing confusion and disorganization. Try, for example, cutting out the twenty lines in which Phèdre delivers her soul after her jealousy is aroused. It at once becomes evident that the speech has dramatic value, so that omitting it would necessitate a great deal of reconstruction in other parts of the play. As for what Shakespeare's tragedies would be without their soliloquies — the imagination refuses to take so laborious a flight. It is plain that the lyric element cannot, like the epic, be casually left out of the older plays; and upon examination it becomes quite as plain that

when the modern play determines not to soliloquize it must do something else in earnest to make up for the loss of so useful a device.

The lyric, as we find it in poetry, takes many forms, but it has two invariable qualities; it is emotional and it is self-revealing. The latter quality — that of illuminating the innermost recesses of the heart — is the one which the dramatic soliloquy takes over for the use and behoof of the play. Every one agrees that it is a simple and almost childish convention, never to be used when colloquy will serve as well. The question is whether it can be abandoned without loss of dramatic expression.

The adherents of the older school put the matter thus: The greatest and subtlest characters in the drama are most in need of this simple, old-fashioned device. The conscience tragedy, the war within the soul, the fight between the higher and the lower nature, which is the most dramatic struggle of all, cannot be set forth in colloquy. The soul of man is solitary and withdrawn. If it expresses itself at all it must be in solitude. The dramatist who rejects the soliloquy limits his opportunities, for it is only the shallower and more superficial characters that can fully reveal themselves without it.

The advocates of the newer school have up to the present been so busy creating literature that their comments upon their own ways and means are of the most fragmentary and disconnected. However, they claim, first of all, that they are striving as honestly as their predecessors to make art create the illusion of life, and that it is their methods merely, not their aims, which are new. Furthermore, they explain that it is their highest ambition to allow the spectator to make the acquaint-

ance of their dramatic characters as he would learn to know strangers in life, merely by accumulating impressions of them. They consider that when the hero of a play soliloquizes he is giving the audience the dramatist's conception of his (the hero's) nature. It is treating the audience with greater respect to assume that it can, in face of a play which is worth seeing at all, make its own deductions from its own observations. As for the hero himself, it is treating him more considerately to allow him to maintain a natural reticence and reserve, and not to drive him upon the stagey device of talking his soul out for the benefit of the audience.

The Indirect Vision

The realists have perhaps invented nothing wholly new to take the place of the time-honored soliloquy. But they acknowledge that if an audience is denied the privilege of seeing the hero as he sees himself, it must be made to see him all the more plainly as he appears to others. And so they have greatly strengthened and perfected a not unfamiliar device — that of making their characters seen by the indirect vision. That is, they strive to make the audience see each character in a play as he is reflected in the minds of every other person on the stage, believing that the sum total of these varied reflections is the greatest and truest help the audience can have in forming its mental concept. To illustrate, it may be said that Molière brought the art of this to perfection, very notably in his presentation of Tartuffe. It will be remembered that, although the arch-hypocrite is most indisputably the hero of the piece, his appearance upon the stage is deferred till the second scene of the third act, when the play is more

than half finished. But meanwhile he has been so thoroughly talked over by the extremely varied members of Orgon's household, each one of whom has an altogether different point of view, that he looms up distinctly in every one's mind. All the time the suspense is deepening, and preparation is being made for one of the greatest enters of dramatic art.

A comparison between Shakespeare's way of presenting Iago and the above introduction of Tartuffe is of the greatest significance. Iago talks to himself volubly from the first, in speeches that are doubtless the most highly dramatic soliloquies to be found in or out of Shakespeare's plays. Every one of them forces the action on, and illustrates the most artistic use that can be made of the soliloquial form. Tartuffe, having been kept off the stage till past the usual place for the climax of the play, when at length he does come on, naturally talks to other people. There is little left for him to say to himself. Soliloquy would be the most forced and undramatic form of expression that he could use. His character has been thrown into high relief by indirect vision sharpened and strengthened to the uttermost.

Belief in the dramatic value of the indirect vision is the flame of the realist's faith. And so far from fearing to trust their technique in the handling of a character that is subtle or profound or in any way especially difficult, the devotees of realism consider that such a character is just the kind they can manage better than any other. Nay, more, they hold that characters so individual and complex and unusual that the romantic play would reject them as impossible, can easily, by the newer method, be made to live and move and have their being on the stage. The man of whom

one would say in life, "He cannot be described; you must see him to know him," is precisely the man whom the realist exults in putting into a play, giving him a long rope, so that he can act for himself. A more primitive hero might be forced to talk to himself about himself, but the complex and unique nature requires first to be absolutely created and then to be scrupulously let alone.

What, for example, could soliloquy do for Hedda Gabler? Would it not seem a very clumsy device for her to use? But we begin to accumulate the most distinct impressions of her from the first rise of the curtain. We see her as she appears to Tesman, to Judge Brack, to Lövborg, to Thea and to Miss Tesman. And upgathering these impressions, we estimate her, not correctly perhaps (who shall say what is correct as regards Hedda?) but as adequately as if we had met her in life. And to go beyond life, or in any way to transcend it, should never, the realist protests, be the ambition of true art.

Recognizing, then, that he must strengthen the indirect vision, and make the audience see each character as all the other characters see him, the realist is compelled to a most masterful handling of the forces of his play. They must react and interact by all the methods that make for unity and compactness and intensification of dramatic effect. No part can be created for its own sake, but every part must be for the play. No character may tell stories or talk about himself to himself. The lines of action must never straggle. Every force must tend inward instead of outward.

Not the least of the achievements of the newer school is the inevitable re-enforcement of the crises by the dramatic pressure back of them. At the points where

the action turns, few words are more effective than many, apostrophe is uncalled for, and silence is often surcharged with dramatic expression.

Witness the close of the first act of "Monna Vanna." There, if ever, would have been an occasion for a long soliloquy in a romantic play. But Vanna has been made vivid to every one in the absorbing colloquy, nearly a third of the play in length, between Guido and old Marco. Then, when she appears, she speaks in broken sentences, and chiefly to say that she cannot speak. But her silences are intensely dramatic.

Popular Discussion

The discussion of the soliloquy, pro and con, is now one of the most interesting in the study of dramatic art. And, on the whole, the public seems less impatient of such discussions than formerly. It does not quite take the French attitude, that art lives upon experiment, variety of attempt, interchange of views and comparison of standpoints; but it seems willing to admit that when there are two ways of creating an artistic effect, an impartial comparison of them may be informing and stimulating. We are learning that it is possible to entertain two ideas at one and the same time. The familiar protestation, "I don't know anything about art, but I know what I like," is less frequently heard. Sometimes it takes the form of the admission, "I am not always sure what I like, but I strive to know something about art." At any rate, we are beginning to realize that, even in this land of the free, if we must draw absolute conclusions about art matters, it is well to have a wide knowledge and a comprehensive breadth of view back of them.

XII

REALISM IN THE MODERN PLAY

NOT long ago, the statement was made in a bit of dramatic criticism, that homespun rather than ermine has most deeply influenced the world; and thence was deduced something about the uplifting force of realism. This quite indicates the prevalent view, which seems to be that when literature deals with homespun, it is for that reason realistic, while anything about ermine must by the same token be romanticistic. Thus is counsel perpetually darkened, in spite of the fact that some of the most foolish and unuplifting literature in the world has resulted from a romanticistic view of homespun, and some undeniably sincere and enlightened plays and novels have treated ermine with uncompromising realism. Once again must it be observed that what distinguishes the school of realism from the school of romanticism is not choice of material. The world is all before all artists of whatever convictions, and it would be vain to warn any of them to keep off the grass here, or not to trespass on private grounds there.

Perhaps it comes back once more to some vagueness in the concept of what schools of art are, and how they are formed.

The more we compare and contrast the more we incline to think that the aim of all art has ever been

one and the same: to create the illusion of life. It is doubtful whether the realist has an especially earnest desire to "show life as it is," to "be true to human nature," to "keep close to actual life" or to "portray real living people." This was the language of the romanticist before him; and if the still earlier classicist did not exploit the same tremendous phrases (which mean so much and yet so very little) it was doubtless because he lived in a less introspective age, and was not so curious in searching his own soul. In the endeavor to completely represent life all artists have striven desperately, and have thought their ways the best. It is in the matter of the ways and means employed, some successful, some utterly futile, some honest and artistic, some insincere and tawdry, that we find the variation.

Now it happens at long intervals of time that some artist who has fine natural vigor, though he may at the moment be very obscure, will begin to create real effects by new and startling methods. If he absolutely triumphs in representing life with fresh vividness and impressiveness he will surely, no matter how revolutionary his ideas, inspire other artists, far and near, to make trial of the same means. Thus will be formed a guild of craftsmen, perhaps centered in a capital, perhaps scattered over half the globe, but all bound by the strongest tie that can hold artists together — the perfecting of devices by which they may deliver their souls to the world.

After some such fashion the latest school of dramatic art was formed. What chiefly distinguishes the realist, then, is not that he writes of homespun while others treat of ermine; but that, in choosing either kind or any other kind of material, he handles it with a new firmness and precision of touch. Like the novelist, he

has triumphed over the helplessness and clumsiness of some of his predecessors. Certain crude and tiresome qualities no longer mar his plays. The realist *knows how.*

The Realist's Methods

Granted, then, that it is a matter of technique, all that is necessary is to show what the realist does that has not been done before, and what he manages to avoid doing that has hitherto been done mistakenly.

First it is obvious that he is marked out by his attitude toward human nature. It is not enough to say that he respects it more profoundly than it has ever been respected before; it must be further set forth that his respect is of a peculiar kind. He candidly admits to himself that a great deal of life is neither grand, nor inspiring, nor powerful, nor exciting, nor saintly, nor villainous. He bravely faces the fact that human nature, whatever it ought or ought not to be, is in actuality often tiresome, commonplace, even foolish, stupid and insipid. But he respects human beings and real life with the profound feeling of the creative artist for his material — for the only material, that is, in which and with which he can ever hope to work. Moreover, he is content to study his material with the sole aim of understanding it, having the fullest realization that this is the task of a lifetime and more, so that anything like reforming or refining that which he is working with must necessarily be omitted for lack of space.

His deeply artistic regard for human nature forces him to base his art on observation — on the more or less literal taking of notes — and on that alone. At this point there is much to give us pause, for the true artist's power of observation is not casually to be mentioned.

It has been called an immense sensibility — the very atmosphere of the mind — a responsiveness to life in general that causes instant response to its slightest manifestation. To be one of those upon whom nothing is lost is the greatest of all assets for the artist who would represent and in no measure misrepresent life.

It is generally conceded that the theory of the realist, which bases his art on the taking of notes, is, whether sound or unsound, more intelligible and consistent than the opposing theories of other schools. For example, a jealous character is to be introduced into a play. The process is to exteriorize the character as completely as possible. The realist has long accustomed himself to observe, with a patience and respect that refuses to meddle, precisely how the jealous *genus homo* acts and speaks, and also how other people act toward him and speak to him. And so he creates and places his character accordingly. He is confident that, if his observation has been fine enough and his use of it is adroit enough, the spectators will, by adding impression to subtle impression, penetrate the nature of the aforesaid jealous human being as sanely as if they were observing him in business or social life. The whole process of creation is from without in, the dramatist disclaiming any ambition to do more for his audience, in the way of enlightenment, than life is wont to do for the impartial observer. "To show what life shows is enough for me," he seems to be saying to himself. "My care must be that it is not too much." The jealous character neither unpacks his heart upon the stage in soliloquy nor puts his head out of the window in confidential asides to the audience, while the actors about him ostentatiously turn deaf ears. He is permitted to speak and act like a human being, surrounded

by other human beings. The audience, having observed him as in life and considered the attitude of others toward him, is allowed to make its own deductions without being spoon-victualed (the term is an invention of the new school) with information by the officious contrivances of the author. By a process of gradual recognition, which, like the dramatist's mode of creation, works from without to the depths of the soul, the character becomes known to the spectator, not preternaturally, nor supernaturally, but as one human being may be known to another.

The realist's art, then, begins by exteriorizing and ends with a revelation of the innermost nature.

The Romanticist's Methods

Over against the realist's conception of basing his art on observation and the taking of notes — a method which is at least tangible — the romanticist places his philosophy of art, which is not so clean-cut. It seems to be based on a curious combination of experience and imagination, which makes it individual and limited. Experience, casual as much of it must be, is certainly a fragile reed for the artist to lean upon, since by the very act of creating, which is so often cruel in its demands upon time and strength, he fences himself in from contact with the world. As for imagination and sympathy, it is so picturesque and popular a view which represents the artist as getting inside of his characters and feeling with them and for them, that it is of no avail to try to dispel it. It is one of the fair apparitions that will not down. The most that can be done is to suggest one or two reasons why a character thus created, instead of being, as is always

claimed, supremely dramatic, is liable to fail of being dramatic at all.

Fancy the playwright with his scenario before him. It usually involves at least three principal characters — the hero and the heroine (the very names are unreal) and somebody to make trouble between them. All of these, as well as the characters which form the setting, must be as highly differentiated as possible, each having individuality enough to give him an excuse for being. Now, if the author adopts the imaginative and sympathetic method, he must adopt it once for all, since he cannot well be outside and inside of his creations at the same time. A jealous character, for example, must act as the author imagines that he himself would act if he himself were jealous; and so with a magnanimous character; so with the high, the low, the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the jester, the murderer, the lover, the artist, or the business man, to the end of the category. Obviously, some of his characters will be more vital than others, since personal experience, however varied and extensive, must somewhere come to an end. At best, his creations will have a certain personal lyrical effect, not without charm, even in a play; at worst, they will recall the camel which the scholarly German evolved out of his inner consciousness. If the dramatist sympathizes at all, he will inevitably sympathize with some of his characters more than with others, the result being those non-dramatic likes and dislikes which distort the truth, and are the scorn of the realist. There will be little spontaneity, for the characters will neither move nor stand still, speak nor keep quiet, except as the author projects himself into them, one after another. And, worst of all, the crises will not come about inevitably, but must be brought

about by main force. If such an author is reported to have said, in an interview, that he wept over his heroine's misfortunes, or contracted a case of brain fever in the effort, prolonged perhaps for months, to fancy how a murderer would feel, the public is amazed and awed at such evidence of genius, even if the heroine in question is somewhat typical, and the murderer not so very murderous after all.

In contrast to such spectacular distress and exhaustion, the realist has, on rare occasions, described a peculiar joy and satisfaction in the work of creating. The characters whom he likes best are the ones who, whether bad, good or indifferent, stand most firmly on their own feet, act out their own natures most independently, and in the end get out of his control, so that they fairly make things happen — even murder and suicide, if such events belong in the play. Thus the author is spared the tiresome necessity of arranging coincidences, pursuing the hero, coercing the heroine and constructing pasteboard murderers. He is in no danger of so sympathizing with his hero that he is tempted to protect him from disaster, or, what is commoner, to make his misfortunes merely theatrical. He is not tempted to half exploit a dastard's meanness because of being disgusted with trying to feel it; for in his attitude of observer he is spared the disgust. His tragedy, coming of itself, as it always does, is the most real and terrible in the world, and would be fairly unendurable to its creator if he were in the sympathetic and imaginative frame of mind. He shrinks from nothing, because he is where the author should ever be, outside, not inside, the play. And the public, getting the full effect and not the mere intent of his art, is thereby so much the gainer.

The Scope of Realism

It is one of the triumphs of the form of dramatic art which is based on observation that its scope is so vast. Indeed its boundaries are those of life itself. Any nature may be represented, because any nature may be observed; and the realist fairly exults in creating the uniquely individual human being, whose mental processes cannot be followed, and whose nature is perhaps remote from anyone's sympathy. Some of the men and women whom Ibsen handled with the easiest mastery — Halvard Solness and Hedda Gabler, for example — would have completely daunted and baffled a romanticist.

The realist's regard for the freedom of his subjects, as he has now and then expounded it — the true artist's delight when his work of creation is so completely achieved that he can stand aside a little while his creatures act for themselves — this is precisely what the public of today, trained as it has been to marvel at falser methods, is least able to understand. And undoubtedly it is past the comprehension of anyone but the artist himself. To him it must be the greatest reward of his greatest efforts.

The delusion is hard to kill that counts the rearranging of life and the modifying of its psychology as more difficult and more praiseworthy than the representing of it. But one reason why life in its verity is too much for any but the greatest dramatic artists is because it is so full of exceptions and aberrations, and so illogical in its working. Life is very unaccommodating in the matter of illustrating the motives of plays, and leading to striking finales and tremendous catastrophes. Furthermore, it is not instructive in exactly the way the

romanticists would like to have it. It seldom proves anything conclusively, and it teaches chiefly the danger of being too sure what is absolutely right or absolutely wrong. Its situations are all interesting, but are apt to become non-dramatic if meddled with. So, after all, a very good way to make a play is to present a situation which is not too detached from its natural setting, bearing in mind, withal, that since life is an inconclusive affair, it is best not to wind up with too great a flourish.

The easy criticism of all this is that it makes art trivial, dull, sordid, uninspiring. As it is all a matter of taste, it seems of little use, for the old *non disputandum* reason, to try to formulate a reply. Like a new development of any art, realism must create the taste by which it is to be relished. But when comment goes a step further, and pronounces even the best of realism non-moral or immoral, a reply at once presents itself.

It was Victor Hugo who said, in one of his militant prefaces, that since man is eternally curious about himself, one demand which he always makes of a play is that it shall depict human nature and promote self-knowledge. Now, realism has always exhibited, more effectively than classicism or romanticism, two views of human nature which are always and ever helpful. The one shows plainly those traits which all human beings have in common, and insists that precisely because they are common they shall be studied and recognized as not peculiar to anyone. The other view presents individuality as it has never been shown before, and insists that it, in its turn, shall be recognized and appraised, and never considered common. In the art of the new school both views are vivid, and each is safer and saner because not presented without the other.

XIII

WHAT IS DRAMATIC LITERATURE?

Illustrated by "The Admirable Crichton" and "What Every Woman Knows"

By James M. Barrie

MR. BARRIE'S best comedies are good examples of what is meant by dramatic literature in the more exact understanding of the term. So many plays, especially in English, are either drama (action) and not literature, or literature and not drama, that we are unaccustomed to the criticism of dramatic literature in the sense understood by the French.

It is easy to be voluble about the purely dramatic side — at least we all have favorite actors and actresses, and are full of ideas about the best interpretation of great parts. The merely literary view, too, is easy to get, for often we may, if we like, read a play in book form, and bring to bear upon it critical instincts that have been sharpened upon literature in general.

But in estimating a play, or in comparing one play with another, to keep both action and style in view, and look on both impartially, is not easy. Yet this is what study of the drama means.

Mr. Barrie's best plays are "The Admirable Crich-

ton" (1903) and "What Every Woman Knows" (1908). They have never been published (this forestalls the literary view), and they are not so new upon the stage as to be unfamiliar, nor so old as to be forgotten. It may be interesting to compare them for a moment, and observe some of the subtle qualities which make them worthy to be called dramatic literature.

They are alike in being so entertaining and exhilarating as to ensnare the heedless, and yet so richly ideaed and so full of the thoughts that breed thought as to satisfy the judicious. Each play consists of four acts, constructive, cumulative, adroitly related to one another, and firmly imbedded in the play as a whole.

Now, a four-act play which is evenly good throughout is a rare treat. Too frequently, in drama of such make, we are obliged to tolerate one act (it may be any one of the four) which is either so poor as to fall below the level of the whole, or so detached as to be a mere episode. As far as keeping shape is concerned, the four-act play seems harder to make than the play, now so common, with only three acts.

These comedies, then, are noteworthy for being well sustained. In each the climax is at the close of the third act, and at various points there are fine pantomimic crises. The time of action in each case is several years. Striking scenic effects are employed, the earlier play having three stage sets and the later play four.

In spite of superficial likenesses, however, there is the most refreshing unlikeness in concept and intellectual drift. Barrie appears to be in no danger of self-repetition. We never mark in his plays (as in Pinero's, for example) the reappearance, under thin disguise, of character, incident or device. He is always

unmistakably Barrie, but each new play takes us to fresh dramatic fields and new intellectual pastures.

The line of action of these two comedies is as different as their spirit. A descriptive sub-title for "The Admirable Crichton" would be "It Cannot Be Done." So the play, after making a wide excursion in time and place and hap (shipwreck on an island, you remember, two years of exile, and life *à la* Robinson Crusoe) turns full circle and appropriately ends where it began. We realize that after the last curtain comes down things will go on much as before the first curtain went up. Here is completion of the dramatic design, but without finality. This is always good structure, especially for comedy. Events in life do not often, it is true, return upon themselves and come to nothing. But they have a ridiculous tendency to result in far less than is expected. So an indeterminate ending to a vastly exciting experience is of good comedic effect upon the stage.

"What Every Woman Knows," on the contrary, does come to something. The whole play is built upon the idea of accomplishing the well nigh impossible. The feat of making John Shand laugh is dramatic triumph enough for one comedy, even if nothing else happened. So in this play the final act is far separated from the first in time and place, and the end is sharply contrasted with the beginning. The action having opened in the humble abode of the Wylies, closes after eight eventful years and many transitions in the beautiful country seat of the Comtesse de la Briere. Nor are the Mr. and Mrs. Shand of the final scene the same John and Maggie who make the preposterous contract at the outset. It is curious to observe, however, that the receptive and adaptable Maggie has changed far less than the self-

centered John — that "extraordinary queer" character whom nobody understands but himself. Indeed, the *dénouement* lets in so much light upon Mr. Shand's inner consciousness that we imagine, what with his newly acquired sense of humor, and his partial realization of what his wife has been doing, he must be permanently transformed. And our speculation as to what he may be likely to do next opens the play out into the future, and saves it also from a theatrical flourish of finality.

The best pantomimic effect in the earlier play is at the end of the second act — that famous scene with the kettle of broth as the center of interest. Crichton has been dismissed for arrogance. But notice to leave on a desert island being rather ineffective, there is nothing for the gentry to do but to go away and leave him. Unfortunately, however, they are half starved; and as the former butler has a savory stew cooking over the fire, they all creep back one by one, Lady Mary last, subdued to the most perfect social equality by the pangs of hunger. So profound is the pantomimic meaning that not a word is needed — and that is high praise for any scene in any play.

In "What Every Woman Knows" there is much good pantomime, notably the game of chess at the beginning of the play. No introduction could be more effective; and really, since any audience is apt to lose so many first lines of a first act, it is strange that pantomime at that point is not used more frequently. Clearly it would not always be possible; but a little ingenuity counts for a great deal before the action gets under way, and so a lineless opening might more often be made to serve.

The climaxes in these delightful comedies can hardly

be called pantomimic. 'But in the earlier play, when the boom of the gun is heard, what the hero does is more impressive than what he says. His exclamation, "Bill Crichton 's got to play the game," is exciting, but it is when he pulls the lever and the beacons blaze out their signal to the receding ship that the real climax is reached.

As for the other play, nothing that Maggie says, though she never speaks but to the point, is so eloquent as that moment when, without a word, she drops her knitting from her passive hands. No dramatist understands better than Barrie the old dictum that what is shown has higher value on the stage than what is said.

In both plays there are good illustrations of how stage scenes may be made to economize explanation and exposition. After the second act of "The Admirable Crichton" there is an interval of two years. But the moment the curtain rises on the third act, disclosing the interior of the tent, so much that has meantime happened is revealed to the eye that there is no need of tiresome narration or reminiscence. And a like effect is created when the curtain goes up on Shand's committee rooms in Glasgow. Though six years have elapsed between acts, the posters and signs tell us at once, without any long "bridging over" speech, that John is near the first goal of his ambition.

Even hasty examination such as the above shows that in these comedies there is an inextricable mingling of drama and literature, two quite different forces, which may not safely be considered apart.

XIV

THE PURPOSE PLAY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

THE relation between art and life is deep and subtle, but so real as not to be hopeless of a simple setting forth. To begin with, there is the old dictum that art reveals the artist. In terms of constructive art the greatest minds have ever delivered themselves on the greatest themes — as life, death and immortality. And the more indirect the expression, the more complete the personal revelation. In nothing is this truer than in dramatic art, for a great play always projects most marvelously the innermost soul of the dramatist. It is one of the paradoxes of the strange art of making plays that the more strictly a dramatist withholds himself from his dramas, the more easily his true nature may be reconstructed from the sum total of his work. For example: Ibsen is unfailingly dramatic; Pinero often harangues and preaches. Which man do we know most about?

The Imitative Quality in Art

Then, too, the imitative quality or function in art awakens observation and prompts to the study of human nature. It is not so much that art directly reveals life; but often life must be variously represented to us, in

prose, in verse, on the stage, and in the plastic arts, before we are stimulated to study it for ourselves. That the final outcome of great art is to turn us, right about face, away from the illusion, miraculous as it is, and toward life itself, is not the least beneficial of its effects.

Zestful Interest in Art

And then (to a realization of this we are just awakening) a zestful interest in the fine arts is one of the sanest and wholesomest of enthusiasms, which the American is temperamental enough to enjoy like a Frenchman. The excitement over a new novel, a new symphony, a new play or (for our horizon is widening) a new school in any form of expression, is equally salutary to those who are at the restless age when they must go wild over something, and to their elders, who, if they wish not to grow old, must keep their minds hospitably open to new ideas and impressions. As to promoting good fellowship, who cannot recall occasions when, for a few days or weeks, everybody talked about some new, startling, stimulating work of art, and frequently three or four people talked at the same time?

Perhaps no very wise deductions were made, but there was electricity and tonic refreshment in the air, and while it lasted nobody thought about himself or gossiped about his neighbor. As the immortal Gabriel Nash would say, the world was brightened for a good many people, and for a brief space the ideal was brought nearer to them, "with its feet on earth and its great wings trembling." Best of all, when the excitement passed, it left an abiding memory of the truest

social intercourse, and a kind of prophetic responsiveness, ready to acclaim with livelier receptivity the next great work in whatever art.

Art is not Reformatory

All this, and more in the same strain, is true, or we hope and believe will ultimately become true, of the interest in æsthetics in this country. But when we requisition the fine arts, or any one of them, to be corrective, or reformatory, or edifying, that, it must be admitted, is another matter. When criticism takes the school-masterly line, it is always under suspicion of not quite distinguishing qualities and discerning technical beauties or blemishes. Our country is still so young that we have hardly passed the stage of getting our backgrounds, against which we may presently see all art, old and new, in better adjustment. Till then the best we can do is to keep steadily before us what has ever been the highest ideal of the art critic — to sympathize intelligently with the artist in his stern struggle for expression, and then to make comparative measurements of his success or failure.

Of late there has been a disposition to separate the drama from the other arts, and, as if it were quite differently related to life, to bind it to an especial moral responsibility. Perhaps this has come about in desperation over the apparent failure of certain other influences upon which society has been accustomed to depend. But it is strange that many people who until recently have been indifferent to even the nobler manifestations of dramatic art are now most confident of the lessons it might be made to teach and the theses it might prove. How they reason from what they re-

gard as a trivial and sometimes degraded past to a highly polemic and reformatory future does not appear, for they are apt to be vague about ways and means. But whatever their logic, they overlook the stubborn fact that it is the object of art to create the illusion of life, and that when it fails to create illusion, it ceases to be art. Now nothing dispels illusion like the evidence of contrivance. As Mr. Walkley of the London *Times* says, "Let the dramatist for one moment excite the suspicion that this or that incident in his play is there because his thesis requires it to be there, and the game is up." That is, the illusion is blown clean away, and the drama ceases to be art. It may be regarded as a vehicle of the truth, but the truth is never so weakened in effect as when it mistakenly chooses the mere mechanical form of one of the fine arts as a means of exploitation.

Then, too, it is argued that the moralizing play may be an effective cure for the demoralizing play. If this were so the outlook would be more hopeful. Because the severely purpose play, not wholly destitute of literary qualities, is by no means the most difficult of all to create. If only it could be trusted to sweep from the face of the earth the play which deserves not even the name of play, that would be a reason for wishing to see it and nothing else, indefinitely.

But it is only too plain that contention against the drama which debases the moral currency must be by methods more ingenious and practical than merely setting over against it, as a rival in interest, the sociological or sermonizing play. Such drama, burdened with its "message," is often too imperfectly dramatic to seize powerfully even the "fit audience though few," which it most readily finds. How, then, can it be ex-

pected to overtop all other excitements in the minds of the audience that is neither fit nor few? Experiment has proved times out of mind that to impress a big audience a play must abound in vitality, be spontaneous in motivation and (most significant in this connection) sound in its fundamental dramatic qualities.

After all, perhaps the best reason why dramatic art has always refused to be bound to a thesis is because life, to which it must "throw back," is so illogical and inconclusive. The more honestly a situation is worked out on the stage, the less valuable it is as evidence in any cause. It is hard, even in philosophy, to make life "illustrate" an idea, without getting into the way of looking at it crookedly. Still more difficult is it to force a play to illustrate a theory or a moral purpose, and withal keep it normal and artistic. The play which broadens out at the end with the thoughts that breed thought is more effectual in any good cause than the one which comes to a formal and didactic conclusion.

The Moral Implication of Art

It is, then, a safe generalization that the great play, even when local and temporary — and the best drama has usually been quite of its own time and place — must have in it much of the universal and the eternal. The enveloping idea or ideas must be large and ample, so that the spectator may grow larger minded as he gazes and listens. As for the moral teaching, that may fairly be left. The aim of true dramatic art is so lofty, its struggles are so stern, and its triumphs so hard won, that it may well be trusted to keep itself out of

mischief. Moreover, Providence long ago took the ultimate effect of all the fine arts into her especial keeping. Whenever any one of them gains its highest level it stretches upward an eager hand to welcome and draw down all high spiritual influences. Henry Arthur Jones puts it most impressively when he says: "So cunningly economic is nature that she can slip in her moral by hook or by crook. There cannot be an intellectual effort in any province of art without a moral implication."

Art is long and slow to develop in the life of any nation; nor has it ever been wont to preach or teach its way into favor. Let us give our drama time and chance to come into its own. If we expect it to fulfill purposes unknown to art in the older countries, we may dishearten it for its best efforts. Meanwhile it becomes us to adventure our souls as often as possible among the masterpieces, that we may be sure of our foundations and backgrounds. So shall our appreciation become less opinionated and didactic — in a word, less immature. Then shall we make those large demands upon our native drama that have ever brought the greatest results.

XV

THE PIECED-OUT PLAY

THE contemporary play seems to be having troubles of its own, not the least of which is the difficulty in making enough of itself to come to the time limit of performance without somewhere patching or piecing or stretching itself out.

What Ibsen did so marvelously well his successors are doing laboriously. The economy of characters and the reduction of the external action is probably one cause of this trouble, and the centralizing of place may be another. However, there must be something more, for neither Sophocles nor Molière assembled many characters nor allowed themselves much space for the action of their plays, which nevertheless filled the accustomed time without being prolonged by cheap devices.

The shortening or leaving out of the long speech, descriptive, expositional or soliloquial, has probably wrought more annoyance than anything else. Then, too, there is the disappearance from the serious play of the humorous or farcical scene. The strenuous play of the present, with its infused or diffused humor and satire, no longer needs the relief of the contrasting scene. Then there is a smaller matter likely to be overlooked. The three-act play has only two intervals, while the five-act play (now so rare) had of necessity

four. So, allowing ten minutes to an interval, it appears that the mere change in the number of acts gives the new play an extra twenty minutes to occupy. There may be other still more practical complications. At all events it is only too evident of late that many a play is like the mock turtle which David Copperfield bought for his first dinner party and which proved, as Steerforth said, "rather a tight fit for four." The material out of which the modern play is made often seems a tight fit for three acts and tighter still for four.

Handling Dramatic Material

Now this kind of play, even when it is of the better sort, is apt to obtrude its construction — or misconstruction — upon the notice. That is, the piecing out of its essentials is often so clumsy that anyone may see both how and why it is done. Sometimes the observant spectator perceives this mechanism in spite of the best will in the world not to be disillusioned; and then, reasoning from the unworkmanlike play to the workmanlike one, he is fairly driven to some conclusions as to how they must have differed while they were in the making.

It looks as if the far beginning might be much the same, whether the finished work be admirable or only tolerable, for the triangular framework is hardly ever varied. At least there is always a hero and a heroine, and generally, for the third angle in the outline, either a man as in "Tartuffe," a woman like Ellean in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," or a child like Aristobulus in "Herod." Sometimes the disturbance is caused by a departed spirit, as in "Œdipus," "Hamlet" or "Ghosts." But there seldom fail three

principal characters for some kind of dramatic permutation and combination.

It is the manner of conceiving these three fundamental characters at the outset that makes all the difference. The realist of the best school fairly sees them as human beings, not creations of his own manufacture, and because, to his clearer vision, they are human beings, they have a distinct and natural background; and because they are thrown up against such a background, in the midst of a natural setting of other human beings, the dramatist at once perceives minor characters in abundance all about them, and is able to select (mark the gracious word!) enough of these minor characters to make his play amply fill the three or four acts and the conventional two hours of performance. The motives for the minor characters need not be invented, for they will spring out of the original controlling motive; the colloquy, however brilliant, is sure to be dramatic, not literary; and the growth of the whole drama will be by the fine and safe process of discriminating and omitting.

On the other hand, the playwright whose methods are less spontaneous, having evolved his leading characters laboriously, sees them, not normally among their fellow men and women, but isolated and swung out into space. The cross relations within such a detached trio may be complicated enough for one tense act, or even for two, but when the unfortunate author, driven by the necessity of coming to the inexorable time limit, begins to cast about for his minor characters, the fact that the original three were mechanically created is much against him. As they have no natural setting, he must altogether imagine their friends and their enemies, for whom in turn he must invent motives of

action. These subordinate motives must then be "intermeddled," as the poet Spenser would say, with the central motive; and finally everybody must talk a great deal about everything in general to fill up the gaps.

It is indeed one thing to work by a masterly cutting-down process, which makes the whole structure firm and beautiful of finish, and quite another thing to interpolate and interpose here and there, in a small framework, various materials which, to quote Spenser again, are "accidents rather than intendments." One suspects that the dramatic tinker sometimes deliberately calculates which of his three acts it will be least conspicuous to attentuate in order to fill out the others. Frequently he seems to decide in favor of the second, perhaps on the principle that if the first act is interesting enough to ensnare the attention, and the third cumulative enough to leave a final impression, the audience may be hoodwinked into thinking the middle of the play not so very scanty and pointless after all.

It is plain to be seen which kind of play is the greatest temptation to the starring system. The built-out play always, in and of itself, suggests a star and satellites. It is the play that is conceived as a whole, minor characters and incidents being a part of its organism from the first, which demands for just and fair treatment that every man and woman in the cast shall act, not to illuminate a star, nor yet to strengthen his or her own part, but for the fullest interpretation of the play itself.

To go out of the way for a moment, the starring system in this country has warped Ibsen's plays worst of all, because they are so highly unified; and the final twist to the distortion has been given by the fact that Ibsen stars, no matter what the play, have almost always

been actresses, and almost never actors. Inasmuch as Ibsen was quite incapable of taking so one-sided a view of society as to create strong parts for women and weak parts for men, this exalting of the feminine has done him grievous wrong. His plays have fared much better in Europe, especially on the continent, where they have been taken more as a matter of course, and have been put on by the best stock companies. It may be added that in the older countries Ibsen has not been *read* so assiduously. Perhaps this has helped to protect him from the *ewig Weibliche.*

Brilliant Stage Conversation

Of all methods of building out plays the device of "making talk" is, at its best, the one for which it is easiest to find excuse. It is, of course, a subterfuge; but then the declamatory speeches of the old drama were often nothing but grand rhetorical subterfuges. Equally of course, merely illustrative dialogue belongs properly to prose fiction. But perhaps it is one result of the singular craze for dramatizing novels that clever talk has obtruded itself into the play. It is not strange that the playwright of today is tempted to emulate the novelist in style, for conversation in fiction has become extraordinarily brilliant. Witness the works of Mrs. Wharton, Mrs. Humphry Ward and Mr. Wells, not to mention Mr. James and Mr. Howells. Even Sir Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, thorough playwrights by first and last intention, have caught some of the novelistic infection. Nor have critics been wanting to applaud them in their imitation — if imitation it be. Of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" M. Filon said: "Such a piece enlarges the

province of the theater. Minute details are to be found in it . . . shades that the theater had left to the novel up to then." And Mr. Walkley of the London *Times* advises encouraging every attempt to transfer to the stage the most advanced methods of fiction.

It would be interesting to hear the comments of thoughtful actors upon some of those wonderfully astute and significant and profound speeches which it is so often their fortune to utter upon the stage. Merely to assume to hit off in ordinary conversation such stimulating reflections upon society and the world at large must make them feel more distinguished than all

> The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,
> The sword, the mace, the crown imperial

of old tragedy.

If it be true that Bernard Shaw is the players' playwright, in the sense that his plays are very widely read by professionals, perhaps it is because, with all his reckless misconstructions, he gives his characters such audacious and sparkling lines. To recite Mr. Shaw's best speeches at an audience must give any speaker a momentary sensation of assisting in the reformation of the universal order of things.

Unsuccessful Imitation of Ibsen

But, whatever excuses may be made for it, we are forced to admit that the present-day play is often a very pieced-out affair. Nor is the cause of the confusion far to seek. Mr. Huneker says in one of his ingenious figures that Ibsen changed forever the dramatic map of Europe. Plainly it is Ibsen who is responsible for the disorder into which the contemporary

drama is now and again thrown. His followers seldom seem to grasp the fundamental difference between the old five-act form and the new three-act form. Nor do they always realize that, though the three-act play may be only a passing phase, it is nevertheless dangerous to trifle with. The severity of its structure makes all superfluities alarmingly obvious; and, then, a poor act is manifestly far more disorganizing in a play which has only three acts altogether than in one which separates itself in the old way into five acts.

On the whole, many plays of the present, as they come and go upon the stage, turn us in increasing admiration toward Ibsen, who never manufactured his plays by the piecing together of parts or the stretching out of any one part or the building on of additions or the inflating of the whole. Good craftsmanship is always enhanced in value when compared with imperfect work of its own kind. Viewed by themselves, the plays of Ibsen show shortcomings and weak places. But lined up with less sure-handed imitations they rise in worth and dignity.

XVI

THE STATIC PLAY

THE question of what constitutes dramatic material is always interesting. What kind of incident it is which prospers best as the germ from which a play may grow is a question which one dramatic period has never been able to answer to the satisfaction of another. At present the debate is probably no more vivacious than it has often been before; but the drama is striving hard to reflect the inner as well as the outer developments of modern life, and its chances and changes provoke discussion.

What is a Dramatic Incident?

It is easy to say that a generation which is fighting microbes and monopolies must perforce have different plays from an age that fought villains and dragons; but to trace the stages by which the attention of the theater audience has been detached from the external and directed toward the psychological is not easy. There are, however, some way-marks.

It was a decade ago that the Belgian mystic made his now famous plea for a static drama; but the echoes of his plaintive cry are still in the air.

"Is it while I flee before a naked sword that my existence touches its most interesting point?

"Does the soul flower only on nights of storm?

"What can I learn from creatures who have no time to live, for that there is a rival or a mistress whom it behooves them to put to death?"

Some years before this Henry James inquired, "What is incident but the illustration of character?" and then blandly asserted, "It is an incident for a woman to stand with her hand resting on a table in a certain way; or if it be not an incident, I think it will be difficult to say what it is." This static heroine of Mr. James' has been quoted and requoted till she is as familiar as Maeterlinck's quiescent hero, "An old man seated in his arm-chair," who is supposed to live "a deeper and more human and more universal life than the captain who conquers in battle or the husband who avenges his honor."

Now, on the stage it is hardly practical for a lady to stand many moments at a time with her hand resting on a table, even if she does it in the most certain way in the world; and a gentleman, old or young, who waits too patiently in an arm-chair is apt to make the audience impatient. It may be quite true, as Mr. James has since declared, that the greatest adventure of all is just to *be* you or I, just to *be* he or she; but it is difficult to make it a stage adventure.

After all, the old "Essay of Dramatic Poesie" puts these protests against the dynamic theater better than contemporary criticism, though Dryden speaks across seven generations from an age little given to subtleties. Commenting upon French plays, which the English then thought very uneventful, he says: "Every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest part of it, except we conceive nothing to be

action till the players come to blows; as if the painting of the hero's mind were not more properly the poet's work than the strength of his body."

This is direct and vigorous, like most of Dryden's prose; but it is chiefly remarkable for its prophetic suggestion of Ibsen. The turn of a new-sprung passion, and especially the alteration or crossing of a design, are favorite motives with Ibsen, who is always successful in making a shift in mental attitude more thrilling than a dagger thrust.

In fact, it was Ibsen who settled the question as to whether psychological analysis could be dramatic, by turning out play after play in which changes of feeling, and even changes of mind, were made exciting without the aid of external action. And now that his plays have become popular, everybody recognizes that in several of them the biggest moments wax and wane without affording the audience much of anything to look at. In "Rosmersholm" many passages of deepest significance appeal almost entirely to the ear. It is interesting when Rosmer and Rebecca pull their minds up by the roots to watch how they are growing; but there is not much to see. And if, while Nora and Helmer are talking at the close of "A Doll's House," the stage were darkened or screened, the colloquy would lose little effect.

As for "The Master Builder," it is claimed that there are moments in its unfolding when the secondary dialogue and the melody of harps in the air become so interpretative that the words of the play may be unheeded. Probably no one, to prove this, has ever tried Diderot's trick of stuffing his ears with cotton wool; but sensible and practical people have been known to affirm that, in the midst of their most breath-

less absorption in Hilda and her Master Builder, they found it hard to keep their attention on the lines, so powerful and significant were the mystical influences flashing back and forth upon the stage.

Thus in many plays by Ibsen and his successors the feat of making psychological analysis dramatic has been triumphantly brought off; and, since it is always easy to be wise after the event, we are now in a mood to say "Why not?" Why, we ask ourselves, since a change in mental attitude is often a supreme moment in life, should it not serve to motive a play, even if it does not express itself in a duel or an elopement. Apparently the old structural forms need not be wholly abandoned. The drama of mental states always has its fundamental "story," just as much as "Ruy Blas" or "Fedora." Often when this story is extracted and set in order it proves a thoroughly good story to tell and to hear — quite as entertaining, indeed, as the mere narrative of many an old romantic tragedy.

And then, even the most static plays, which seem not to move at all, will be found, if carefully examined, to work themselves out on the old lines. There is usually preparation, followed by complication, which culminates in some crisis, which in its turn leads to consequences. The external action may be miraculously subdued, the time reduced to the shortest limit, the place absolutely centered, but the drama moves nevertheless, and that restlessly and rapidly. The scene of events may be the soul or the brain, but there is always conflict and struggle, and somehow or other the play "gets along." Every important speech leaves matters different from what they were before, and pushes on toward the end. In fact, the psycho-

logical drama often moves too rapidly. It has become as full of adventures as a Drury Lane melodrama. One finds difficulty in keeping up with it.

The Tedium of Life

But if the discussion as to whether the psychological crisis can be made dramatic is no longer before us, there remains the question of what may be done with that part of experience which is not critical at all. Between the climactic events of life, whether they be spiritual or material, intervene long reaches of the humdrum, the dull and the commonplace. May these monotonous tracts be brought into any kind of relation to dramatic art?

Maeterlinck's plea was above all else for what we are wont to call the tedium of life. His opening sentence is sufficiently plain: "There is a tragic element in the life of every day that is far more real, far more penetrating, far more akin to the true self that is in us, than the tragedy that lies in great adventure." His most earnest protest is that in moments of passion we do not live our truest lives. To put it more trivially, the book of life is deplorably padded, but if, when it is edited for the stage, the padding is all cut out, what is left is apt to be misleading. In moments of stress and strain there is something of the abnormal, and it is a misrepresentation of human experience to make a few such moments outweigh in meaning the many years when life is normal.

Opposed to this view are many plausible theories. Supreme moments, it is argued, are always more revealing than years of the humble round and daily task. Impulsive action shows life as by a lightning flash.

For example, prompt daring in the face of sudden danger is the best evidence of courage. What the old dramatists called surprise strokes, falling in life, force an instantaneous choice, or compel a headlong act, which betrays the innermost soul. Such focal moments construct life into a plot, and must ever be the best points upon which dramatic action can turn.

These shifting views, abstract as they are, have composed themselves into something very tangible. It may be that the Maeterlinckian static theater will always be a mystical dream; nevertheless, the commonplace and the unheroic have veritably come into their own on the stage. The best art of the day, recognizing that all life is dramatic, and that no part of experience can represent the whole, is successfully striving to bring both sudden crises and long stretches of monotony under tribute to its greatest effects.

Most of all, it is ambitious to exhibit the usual in its normal relation to the unusual. Plays are still motived by critical and focal moments; but all crises are vigorously re-enforced by what has been finely called the vitality of the commonplace. The fact that it is a great adventure for the hero just to be himself, and for the heroine to be herself, is recognized in the general scheme of the play. The creatures of the stage, having no one whom it behooves them to put to death, take time to live. The force of recognition is employed as never before. Repeated recognition of experience and emotion that is common to all mankind is made to precede the surprise stroke, so that when it comes it has strength of appeal and carrying power independent of the author's words or the actor's utterance.

The art of patiently representing life, instead of

adorning it or refining it, has so raised the critical moment in dignity and spiritual meaning that few words and little acting are needed. How deep in the eternal verities some of these effects are based, it is needless to say. Recall the greatest crisis of the greatest tragedy of the realistic school. It comes at the close of the first act of "Ghosts," and it is hardly more than one short sentence. Helen Alving cries "Ghosts! The couple from the conservatory has risen again! Come, not another word!" And no other word is needed.

It has always been said that Ibsen's reduction of the drama to one central moment is a marvelous feat; but the reduction of the moment to pantomime is an even greater triumph. In life, supreme moments are not times when speech is easy. "When nature is dumb," said Dryden, "to make her speak is to represent her unlike herself." The modern drama endeavors to be so normal and honest and free from false illusion on its lower levels that when its climactic points are reached there needs no vast elaboration of grief, wrath or despair. It is then that the vitality of the commonplace surcharges with tragic power the tersest and most unrhetorical utterances.

And so it is interesting to observe that the static play, which comes near dispensing with acting in the literal sense, is the play which best illustrates the force of pantomime at the right moment. The latter-day playwright knows his trade. He not only recognizes that profound emotion is like to close the lips, but he takes into account that when little or nothing is said, then what is done counts most heavily. To strengthen a pantomimic climax so that a gesture or a glance may hold the audience has always been considered the soundest dramaturgic art.

Now, manifestly, when action throughout the play is reduced to its lowest terms, pantomime at the climax is set off as impressively as possible. Thus, in the most inward and spiritual drama, the actor's art finds its noblest opportunities. The old foundations are not undermined, after all.

XVII

ACTING SCENERY

How it Helps the Play to Tell its Story

THE play that is actor proof has become familiar to the public, and needs no explanation.

Scenery that is manager proof is something newer.

"Acting scenery" — "the stage set that is a member of the cast" — such are some of the phrases used to describe the latest experiments in mounting plays.

The public is not altogether clear as to what these terms mean.

The New Scenery

The interesting question about scenery at present is not whether the futurists in scenic art — Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt and others — are likely to succeed; because we know very well that, if they keep their heads, and avoid fads and extremes, they can hardly help succeeding. The value of impressionistic outlines, emotional colors, illusive shadows, and breadth and simplicity of effect is recognized at once. The philosophy they are working out is not wholly novel. It has always been the province of art to make us

see visions, rather than to put before us exact imitations. Impressionism is nothing new, on or off the stage. We know the mysterious effect of color, the delight of filling in vague outlines for ourselves, the imaginative stimulus of deep masses of shadow. We know, moreover, that the impressionist is apt to demand ample space and the utmost adaptation in the direction and fall of light — conditions more easily met behind the proscenium arch of the well-equipped theater than on the wall of the ordinary art gallery.

The question is, what connection can simple pictorial scenery make with the modern, social, intimate drama, which has rather more to say to us today than spectacle or pageant or old romance.

It must be admitted that the tables, chairs, rugs, curtains and bookcases of an ordinary house do not suggest the use of impressionistic outlines or symbolic colors. Nor is it easy to fancy a domestic scene from Pinero or Galsworthy or Thomas acted against a back drop painted with a phantom drawing-room or library. We can only hope the new methods are as universally adaptable as they claim to be. For indeed some of the common stage furnishings have been so overworked in the interest of weak-minded plays, that if anybody wishes to reduce them to outlines we should not object. The tea-table, for example, and the telephone. Furthermore, if clearing stage interiors of some of their ottomans, sofa cushions, foot-stools and smoking stands would make actors less restive, and teach them to keep still when they are not doing anything, we should be glad of the riddance. The grateful repose of the Irish Players seemed traceable in a measure to their economical stage sets.

But we cannot yet quite see the harmless necessary

props of the social drama sketched on canvas, or made of cheese-cloth and electric lights, or thrown out altogether. We await developments.

The Old Scenery

Meantime, much good has promptly come from these brave experiments in creating reality of mood and feeling (the only reality that counts) by means of unreal and inexpensive materials in illusive light and shadow. We are roused to full consciousness of what we have long dimly felt — that costly stage realism has o'erleapt itself and begun to create unreality. Practical properties are all very well; but when they are so ingenious and expensive as to attract attention to themselves, they are as disillusioning to an audience as if they were cheaply and absurdly impractical. Distraction is distraction, as fatal to dramatic illusion when it results from foolish extravagance as when it is mere poverty of resources.

For example: A genuine telephone switchboard on the stage becomes at once the most unreal thing in the world. Being where it does not belong, and where it must have been difficult to place, it makes a sensation — which it would not in life. To the audience it is a constant reminder that the stage where it is fixed is a stage, and not the room which it pretends to be.

As a matter of fact, a cheap make-believe switchboard that could not be manipulated at all would not destroy the illusion more completely.

For another example: The Dutch interior which served as setting for the entire drama of "The Return of Peter Grimm" failed of making precisely the right impression. It was criticised as being too crowded

with details. In reality it was no more crowded than it ought to have been to represent the living-room of an old house that had been occupied for many years by a family of Hollanders. We never criticise Dutch paintings as being "crowded." The trouble was that the scene, instead of creating a unified impression of a roomful of small objects, showed every one of the small objects themselves, thus dispersing the attention. In a painting it would be called the crudest of old style art.

As to the statement that realistic surroundings inspire the actor, somehow that does not ring true. And when extreme examples are urged, they sound positively puerile.

In one of the plays of last season, a certain stage represented a doctor's office, with the usual furniture, including a large desk and a stack of card index boxes. The public was privileged to know — press notices, probably — that the desk was completely filled, drawers, pigeon holes and all, with letters and papers such as a physician would accumulate, all addressed to the stage doctor or signed with his name; that the stationery spread before him had his name and address on letter-heads and envelopes; and that, to crown this triumph of managerial art, the index boxes were full of cards, every one of which was completely made out.

The actor who played the part of the doctor was experienced and accomplished. It really seemed possible that he might have kept his impersonation, even if some of those cards had been left blank. In fact, any actor who has hard training back of him is apt to resent the idea that his concept of a part can be made to depend on preposterous realism which is invisible or meaningless to the audience. An imagination that

is superior to footlights, open flies, and canvas walls is not likely to suffer from the consciousness that an unused drawer in a desk is empty. Moreover, if an actor's hold on his part can be strengthened by mechanical means, it may as easily be weakened, in case some contraption is forgotten in setting the stage. What inspires the intelligent actor more than anything else that can be furnished him in the theater is a comfortable, commodious, well ventilated dressing-room. Such humane accommodation could not, perhaps, be made to figure in a startling press notice; but it would quite conceivably encourage better art.

Difficult Transition from Old to New

Now as to the cure for the false realism which evokes no mood in the spectator and creates no artistic illusion. It seems reasonable enough to say, as the futurists do, that it is useless to mitigate or change the old methods — that they must be swept aside, and a new beginning made. To the impartial spectator, a great deal of the laborious and costly scenery of the day does seem to be based on wholly unsound concepts of dramatic and theatric effect, so that when it is "simplified" it looks to be merely cheapened. And one point is by now very clear — that the new stagecraft, however inexpensive, is destined to be anything but cheap in its total impression. Its effects are costly, even when little money is used to create them.

To illustrate the difficulty in modifying conventional scenery according to imaginative methods: One of the latest elaborations of realistic stage setting is to create an appearance of depth, especially in interiors. Thus, if the place is a living-room or a library,

the doors must give into completely furnished rooms beyond, so that the scene may seem to be in a house and not on a stage. The room being furnished, not to say cluttered, to the last detail, there is apparently nothing for the manager to do but to burrow into the background. Often, however, he defeats his own ends. Because, when a door is opened, the attention of the audience goes through into the inner room, losing all account of what the actors are doing and saying.

Now just about the time when realism-run-mad began to treat the stage as if it were a flat or a model house in a furniture store, the new stagecraft began to devise precisely opposite effects. Its backgrounds are meant to create an impression of shallowness, and are skillfully designed, not to direct the attention of the audience to the depths of the stage, but to withhold or deflect it from the drop curtain, and to turn all eyes toward the actor, who, as the distracted theatergoer needs reminding, is, after all, more essential to the play.

This is one of the ways in which the two methods work directly counter to each other. No wonder the new craftsman thinks the crowded modern stage a poor place to try out his experiments in harmonizing moods and tenses.

What is "Acting Scenery"?

Many of our contemporary social plays are so Greek in their simplicity as to make it appear possible that the simpler and more primitive traditions might be revived in staging them.

Then there are others which seem hardly separable from the most intricate of modern stagecraft.

However, we can all understand with a little explanation what is meant by "acting scenery," and how it favors the new methods.

When stage scenes are conceived by the playwright along with his characters, and are built into the structure of the plot, they are then so related to theme and action, and take such significance from their part in the dramatic scheme, that they create effects quite independent of anything that a manager can do for them — or to them. Outlines and suggestions are more successful in translating such effects than in working out unrelated scenes.

Usually when a scene furnishes an unobtrusive background, with everything in the right key, it does all that it can for a play. But it is possible for scenery to do much more. It can be made to take up the thread of plot and tell the story for a few moments, thus relieving the colloquy of narration, description or exposition. We know that this can be done, because we now and then see, in conventional staging, a scene that really does act, thus becoming, as the new experimenters say, a member of the company.

The best illustration I can recall offhand is from a play which is sincere and honest, but not great — "The Fortune Hunter." The setting for the third act does three things at once, and does them effectually. It tells the story of an eventful winter; it helps out the exposition after the long interruption; and it gives the new act a vigorous forward impulse.

All after this fashion:

When the curtain falls on the second act, it shuts from view Sam Graham's drugstore, dingy, poverty-stricken and forlorn, a rusty stove in the middle, a few stale drugs on the shelves, the mere travesty of

a soda-water fountain at one side. It is a day in September.

The playbill gives the information that when the curtain rises again it will be spring. Moreover, the audience knows, as it generally does by the time a play is half over, what will be the culmination of the plot. But it is in a state of animated suspense as to just how everything is going to be brought about.

When the curtain lifts upon the third act it shows a white, glittering, electric lighted, ultra modern drug-store, stocked with the most pictorial of patent medicines, the most decorative of candies and cigars, and displaying an imposing soda-water fountain like an altar to all the gods at once.

The audience gasps with delight at the transformation, satisfaction in its own cleverness (for it knew Henry Kellogg would make good) and anticipation of what is coming.

The scene has acted. It is in the cast.

Now the point is not exactly that impressionism could here be used for realism, though I incline to think that in commonplace scenes like this the new staging would work very well. The point is merely that the scene is so skillfully related to the dramatic action, and takes so much of its meaning from what has happened before and what is going to happen afterward, that it has more carrying power in itself than can be given to it by the most superhuman ingenuity of stage-craft. It would be effective even if poorly and cheaply staged in the old way.

To go a step further:

Suppose that, for the sake of introducing some other scene, it was necessary to pass over the transformed drugstore without showing it to the audience.

Much narration of what had taken place, and much description of the new store, would then have to be written into the text. And an audience never cares to hear what has been done, if by any process of crowding and telescoping events it can be allowed to see for itself. The play would be weakened.

In the playwright's struggle to rid himself of non-dramatic and story-telling expedients, scenery, rightly used, can be one of his greatest helps.

Another illustration of the power of scenery to act is found in the memorable tent scene in Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton." This picturesque interior tells the story of two years of life *à la* Robinson Crusoe on a desert island; opens the third act intelligibly without reminiscence; and is interesting and amusing on its own account. It is emphatically in the cast, and would lend itself to artistic experiment with simple materials. If proof is needed that the whole scene is a member of the company, it is only necessary to recall the end of the act. The incident that sends down the curtain is, like all dramatic crises, seen as well as felt by the audience, there being an appeal to the eye simultaneously with the appeal to the emotions. When the boom of the gun is heard, the hero hesitates, visibly struggles with himself, exclaims "Bill Crichton 's got to play the game," and then, while the audience breathlessly watches, pulls the lever that lights the signal to the receding ship. Thus the culmination grows directly out of the material surroundings. The scenery is as truly a member of the company as Crichton or Lady Mary. It would please the futurists.

By way of contrast, conceive of an act (and modern plays furnish many examples) which would play almost equally well against any background. Perhaps the

stage is set with an entrance hall which, merely to make a brighter picture, has a door and window opening into a garden. But neither hall nor garden is necessary. If that scenery were left behind or burned up, something else out of the storehouse — a living room or a library or a veranda — would do as well. The speeches have not grown out of the surroundings, nor have the surroundings reacted upon the mood and spirit of the characters. The colloquy has been manufactured in some rarefied atmosphere, remote from the world.

Now when the imagination of the audience is not in the least stimulated, it cannot be expected to fill in outlines or to people shady corners with dim figures. Nothing can be done with an act like this but to stage it as literally as possible. Impressionism is helpless with an act so detached from the plot, mood and theme of the play. The scene is not a member of the company.

Corrective Influence of New Stagecraft

Some one recently said that a stage director ought to be able to think in scenery and electric lights. But for the finest effects, it is the dramatist who must think in outline, color, light and shade all the time that he is thinking in the speeches and actions of his characters. Then his plays will be so harmonious and organic, and will take such admirable shape, that it will be easy to stage them by simple means; and, *per contra*, hard for the most realistic manager to distort or damage them. The spirit and mood of each act can be quickly captured and easily interpreted, and there will be no gaps to tempt the intrusion of unrelated novelties. And it is to be hoped that, when there

are more plays like this, if stage pictures are "held" anywhere, it will not be at the end of the acts, where they destroy all continuity, but at the beginning, so that they can talk a little in their own dumb language, before the speeches begin.

At present, scenes that help to get the story told seem rather casually introduced into plays. Acting scenery is not one of the ideals of dramatic art. But when the new stagecraft begins to prevail, its influence will be corrective and sanative. With nothing spectacular to help them out, plays will strengthen in all that is truly dramatic, and will have so much scenic art in their very structure that they can be interpreted with an economy of ways and means hitherto undreamed of.

And incidentally there ought to be one social and progressive outcome; namely, cheaper seats in the theaters.

The new stagecraft is at least deserving of our interest and good wishes.

XVIII

BRITISH ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

On and Off the Stage

Purity of speech on our stage does n't exist. Every one speaks as he likes, and audiences never notice; it 's the last thing they think of. The place is given up to abominable dialects and individual tricks, any vulgarity flourishes, and on top of it all the Americans, with every conceivable crudity, come in to make confusion worse confounded. And when one laments it, people stare; they don't know what one means. — HENRY JAMES.

IT has more than once been asserted that the worst English in the world is spoken in England. The statement sounds excessive, but on the whole it seems to be somewhere near the truth, though it is not the whole truth. The rustic dialects of some of the shires are almost unintelligible to outsiders; and what is most amazing of all, the common speech of one county persists in remaining as unlike that of another, however closely adjacent, as a turnip is unlike (to be very local) a mangel-wurzel.

Furthermore, the worst crimes against the noble language of our birth are perpetrated in the capital of the British empire; for cockney English is devoid of even the striking picturesque phrases and significant strong words that survive in the language of the countryside. Anything more atrocious in pronunciation and idiom than the English of the swarming millions

of London it would be difficult to conceive. There can hardly be found anything to match it on our side of the water. And this is not a distinctively American observation, but a view frankly conceded by the enlightened Englishman himself.

That the worst English is spoken in England is, however, a half-truth only. The other half-truth is that the best English in the world — that which is most fully in accord with the native genius and characteristic spirit of the language — is also spoken in England. In the land of extremes, where are found the worst and the best, the cheapest and the costliest, the tawdriest and the finest of everything under the sun — in that land, the hearing ear may one moment be grievously afflicted and the next gratified and charmed.

The aforesaid enlightened Englishman has been known to put the case for the defense of his mother tongue in this way: "Take a man who has come out of Oxford or Cambridge, let him move in good society, and give him now and then foreign travel enough to knock off his insularity, and there you are!" And the enlightened American, not to be outdone in frankness, is willing to admit that there he is indeed. Whatever excellence we may reach in the future, American English is not now the equal of British English at its very best.

Two points are noticeable in such a typical speech as the one just quoted. First, cultivated society is insisted upon as necessary to the perfecting of a good spoken style. One is tempted to say that what the dictionary is to an American, society is to an Englishman. Possibly it would do no harm if we, for our part, could get the dictionary more under our feet (it is comfortable to stand on occasionally, but cumber-

some to carry about), and it might be as well if the British, for their part, could be persuaded into a more friendly attitude toward the authorities, even though one of the most widely accepted, Noah Webster by name, did happen to be a Yankee.

It surprises an Englishman when his American friends fall back upon rules and references, as if language belonged exclusively to students; and it discourages an American when his British friends trust too entirely in the matter of style to their God-given instinct as native-born Englishmen. This last, not only because it makes the American feel rather out of it, but because the native instinct has been known, even in the best society, to lead toward a pronunciation and syntax more surprising than anything in any dictionary.

The other interesting point is the mention of foreign languages, which certainly affect spoken style in a way not to be ignored. In our vast land, we have no insularity to knock off; but when vacation time comes around, we may well envy the Englishman his nearness to Germany, and especially to France. Paris has been brought, by quick boats and trains, so close to London that it is possible any day to lunch in one city and dine in the other; and yet, quickly as it may be made, the transition from the British capital to that wonderful French capital which is France itself is like passing from one world into another. In language, customs, and habitudes of thought, the difference between the two peoples, founded as it is deep in those racial traits which keep them distinct as if the seas rolled broad between, is essential and stimulating. The Englishman's annual holiday on the continent may be no better as an outing than the ordinary American vacation; but it is

undeniably different. The educated man of whatever nationality seldom changes his skies, for even a few weeks, without consciously or unconsciously limbering his tongue and gaining fluency and expressiveness in his own language.

The best British English, then, is for one reason or another not quite like the best American English. It is interesting to make comparisons; it always is interesting to compare anything British with anything American, doubtless because there is sufficient background of likeness to throw the unlikeness into high relief.

The difference is generally said to be in the accent. But in the minds of most people accent seems to be more or less confounded with inflection and emphasis. Now it is manifest to the dullest ear that the spoken language of the British Isles does indeed inflect and emphasize after its own fashion, which is not at all the fashion of American speech. But these matters have nothing to do with accent.

Inflection is merely the bending of a sentence up or down at one or more points in the length of it. It is curious to observe that wherever an English voice goes up, an American voice is pretty sure to come down; and that whenever an Englishman makes a full stop, an American "curls the sentence up at the end." (That last is an imaginative Briton's description.) The Englishman finds much entertainment in these contrasts, seeing nothing right nor wrong about any twist that a sentence may take. It is Americans who are fond of laws and who make any number of them to govern themselves. All things considered, since we live in the land of the free, and Britons never have been slaves, it is reasonable to suppose that anybody on either side of the water may bend a sentence up or

down or sideways as he pleases, without being considered "incorrect." The most that may be said is that the English voice, having a way of rising a little higher and descending a little deeper than the American, is less monotonous and often rather pleasanter to the ear.

As for emphasis, it sounds plausible to declare that important words must be stressed. But then, what are the important words in any sentence? To us, the English seem almost as likely to come down upon prepositions and conjunctions as upon verbs and nouns, while to the English our emphasis is just as unaccountable, and is apt, moreover, to sound jerky and labored, recalling the schoolboy's definition — that emphasis means putting more distress in one place than in another. And discussions about the relative importance of this word or that usually resolve themselves at last into mere differences of opinion.

But as regards accent, which always, outside of verse, means pronunciation accent, we may be definite without danger of falling into pedantry or opinionism. English being a highly derivative language, the firm accent which distinguishes a root syllable from its prefixes and suffixes is of the utmost value; and it is a fact that the best of British English achieves this clean accentuation without indistinctness elsewhere in the word. The failure to mark the primary accent by a sharp percussion is what causes the American drawl, with which our ears are so constantly assailed that we hear it with indifference. Nothing illustrates it much better than the old sentence out of Martin Chuzzlewit — "No such *lo-ca*-tion in the *ter*-ri-*to*-ry of the great *U-ni*-ted States."

In the word "territory," for example, the primary accent very obviously should fall upon the first sylla-

ble, and the secondary accent (much lighter) upon the third, the other syllables being unstressed. A degenerate British utterance (all too common, as has been intimated) would make the word *ter*-ri-try. The drawling American strikes the third syllable quite as hard as the first. The perfect utterance, to which we are rarely treated anywhere, by anyone, on the stage or off, is firm on the first syllable and then light on the third, in which the long vowel sound is carefully conserved.

As for such words as *lo-ca*-tion, *sal-va*-tion, *po-lit*-ical, *pre-cise*-ly, they are, if possible, even worse in the drawl with which our very walls re-echo; for their first syllables have properly no accent at all.

It is perhaps digressing to say that in the preservation of pure vowel sounds in unaccented syllables there is no doubt that the service of the Anglican church, familiar to Englishmen throughout so many generations, has exerted an influence. The choir boy who chants "Restore those who are penitent" is fairly safe in later years not to indulge in such crudities as "r'store" and "penit'nt"; and if he intones "quietness" and "trusted" so that the final syllables are not lost under the vast roof that bends above him, his common parlance is the less likely to be marred by "quietnus" or "trustid."

A good accent, then, has to do with pronunciation rather than with inflection or emphasis, and properly means the vigorous stressing of root syllables, without prejudice to the distinct and audible utterance of unstressed syllables, or the purity of their vowel sounds, long or short. We are apt to say that such an accent makes the utterance very neat and shows cultivation; but it does far more. Fidelity to the genius of our language, to its characteristic mode of growth and ex-

pansion, lends it individuality by setting it off from other living languages, and brightens and strengthens and vitalizes the whole diction. Best of all, it confers an effortless fluency and distinctness which, to be quite fair, we have yet to master in our country.

At this point there is always some one to protest that the American drawl is no worse than the English indistinctness, which in its aggravated form is so maddening to the unaccustomed. On the whole, it is probably not so bad. But we should be less inclined to such futile comparisons if we had a standard which would make both drawl and indistinctness objectionable.

The Actor's Responsibility

Everyone agrees that the stage might do much for our long-suffering language; but whether actors or audiences are most to blame for the depression of the "standard" of which we hear so much, it would be hard to say. The responsibility seems to be distributed. Certainly at present the American actor's influence upon his mother tongue is not always beneficial.

Leaving accent out of count altogether, as too fundamental to be easily perfected, one often hears in reputable presentations of our best plays such afflicting diction as this: "I wuz supprised t' hear it. I cannot bullieve it. It is a mustake." And when the hero is overwhelmed with "r'morse," the slurring is (or should be) as disillusioning as a sneeze in the midst of an apostrophe.

It is possible that the over-valuation of dialect by both dramatists and actors has in recent years exerted a baleful influence upon purity of speech. The dialects of the Scotch, the Irish, the Negroes and the Yankees

may be "quaint" and "fascinating," but, after all, they have been used to create some very cheap effects. As the late T. B. Aldrich once said (he abhorred dialect), the English language is too rich and sacred a thing to be thus mutilated and vulgarized. It might be worth while to try making a sensation with a fine accent now and then. At present it could hardly fail to have a quaintness of its own.

British Accent

British accent is often considered to be a superficial matter. Not infrequently the actor who has laboriously drilled himself into saying *bean* for *been* and *nyther* for *neither* and *carstle* for *castle* seems to think he is highly cultivated. But the firm, clean pronunciation accent that marks the best of British English is for many reasons difficult of cultivation. It is based upon a knowledge of derivatives, and it implies a loyal admiration for our own language as contradistinguished from other languages and dialects. It brings, however, its own rewards, not the least of which is the inevitable curing away of many small errors and crudities.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PLAY FOR CHILDREN

ILLUSTRATED BY "CHANTECLER" AND "THE PIPER"

IN considering the question of plays for children, we come upon one of the curious paradoxes often encountered in drama study. The play of child life, in which the leading characters are children, has a strange fascination for grown people; while a certain kind of play which makes no effort at "adapting" to the youthful mind, but deals simply and boldly with the eternal verities of hope, joy, love, ambition and courage, is extremely interesting to children.

The explanation seems to be that plays of child life are attractive to adults because they appeal to their memories of childhood and carry them back to the mystic morning-land of youth. But children, having only the briefest memories to which any appeal can be made, and dwelling continually in their own morning-land, take greater pleasure in looking forward than backward. To them it is the future which is magical and irradiated.

Announcement has just been made that a children's version of "The Blue Bird" is in press. As Tyltyl and Mytyl, the little hero and heroine of all the varied adventures in Maeterlinck's charming play, are youngsters less than twelve years old, the need of this new

version is an apt commentary upon the prevalent notion that a play is suitable for the child merely because some of its characters are children.

To solve the problem of what kind of literature, dramatic or otherwise, is best for children, would be to enter fully into the heart of childhood — a place which grown people might as well admit is somewhat inaccessible.

But there is one sort of drama which children always see with wholesome enjoyment, and which, however profound its final implications, never overtaxes their minds or overstimulates their emotions. It is the kind of great play which is easily and perfectly intelligible to the child as far as he can interpret it at all, and which, in withholding its deepest meanings, is never misleading or confusing. Such a play, seen in childhood, makes a prosperous beginning in the training of the little theater-goer; for his first impressions, slight though they must be, are so absolutely true and right that they need no correcting in later life, but can be deepened and strengthened into complete appreciation.

This means a storing up of enjoyment for the future. For when a great play, seen in years of maturity, not only works its present magic spell, but recalls at the same time the delight with which it was witnessed in childhood — then the pleasure of play-going is at its height.

Rostand's "Chantecler" and Miss Peabody's "The Piper," fundamentally different in all else, are alike in the relation they bear to the literature of childhood. Neither play was written for children; in neither play is there a child hero or heroine. But the greatest moments in both plays — the dawn scene in "Chantecler," for example, and the return of the Piper with his

band of little followers — make that universal appeal to young and old, wise and simple, which always indicates the best drama for children.

"CHANTECLER," FOR ILLUSTRATION

By Edmond Rostand

This play has proved a delightsome piece for children, better than "The Blue Bird," better than "Peter Pan," or "The Piper." And its direct appeal to the child points to much that is significant in the play and in the French people.

The pages of "Chantecler" are full of jokes that prosper by themselves, having no depth of meaning except to the overcurious. Indeed, some of the nonsense is quite on the kindergarten level. Chantecler describes the garden hose as a snake ending like a sprinkling can, the Blackbird calls the watering pot a bald pate with silver hair flowing from his copper scalp, and Chantecler uses a morning-glory vine for a telephone, with one of the blossoms for a receiver. The Blackbird refers to the stag as "a kind of a hatrack," and orders the darning needle to mend the ragged robins; and Chantecler shelters the incubator chicks under his wing "because their mother is a box."

For older children there are other jests, equally quaint and naïve. The Blackbird observes that the weasel often messes his shirt front with an omelet, and that the mole is late because she comes by the subway. The guinea hen invites the pheasant to her salon "to partake of a simple snail," and adds that the tortoise has kindly said, "You may expect me." The tufted

hen cries at sound of a loud honk! honk! "Now everything we eat will taste of gasoline." When the white hen finds a nice crisp bug and the other hens come on a run to see what she is eating, the children can be trusted to laugh, though their comments may not be so profound as the *English Review* which remarks, "Scratching for food is the serious business of life," etc.

When the old hen in the covered basket pops up, as she often does, to shoot out a proverb, she seems to be playing to children, even in the selection of her maxims.

The brilliant and picturesque style is enchanting to every one. For illustration:

The Pheasant Hen (runs to the brink of the hillside and listens). I hear a finger knocking against the rim of a brazen sky.

Chantecler (with closed eyes). The Angelus.

The Pheasant Hen (continuing to listen). Sounds as of a bird's nest fallen into a little street.

Chantecler. The school!

And the pigeon celebrates the cock as "the one whose cry, like a golden needle, stitches the blue hilltops to the sky."

But these are details. Is there enough that is simple and unsophisticated to make a play, and would it be interesting? Let us see.

The prologue, which explains the sounds behind the curtain, is ideal. Nothing could be better as a first call for children's attention. Indeed, it has more than once been likened to the opening of "Peter Pan."

Then, nothing could be better than the arrival of the postman pigeon, or the incident of the butterfly and the net, which is the cue for Chantecler to enter.

The hymn to the sun is, in any translation,[1] of an exquisite clarity. To quote part of a stanza:

> The hayrick by thy favor boasts a golden cape,
> And the rick's little sister, the thatched hive,
> Wears, by thy grace, a hood of gold.

Next come the orders to the chicks as to the slugs to be picked up before evening, to the cockerel as to his voice practice, and to the hens as to their duties among the vegetables. Then follows the colloquy with the saucy blackbird and Patou, the good old dog, much of which is merely frolicsome humor. At this point in flies the terrified pheasant, escaping from a hunting dog. The danger being over, Chantecler offers her his wing for a little stroll, and does the honors of the farmyard. The guinea hen bustles in to invite the stranger to her five o'clock tea (next morning), and the act closes with the poultry falling asleep, but the creatures of the night opening their green or golden eyes.

At the beginning of the second act we have that extraordinary scene, the roll call of the night birds, at every name two big, round eyes brightening in the dark. From the child's standpoint, the hymn to night could be omitted, not as difficult, but as too horrific; and the plot to have Chantecler challenged by the Game Cock at the reception could be disposed of in a few speeches. But Chantecler's great lyrical monologue to the Pheasant Hen while morning brightens all about and beneath them could be kept entire.

Rarely is a lyric outburst inspired by emotions so deep and uncomplicated, and seldom is its dramatic setting so well calculated to make a universal appeal. Young and old, wise and simple, must thrill to the lines

[1] The quotations are from the translation by Gertrude Hall.

of the daybreak scene. The complete meaning of some of the symbols is for later thought, or for fireside reading; but the first sublime impression, strengthened by the kindling sky, is instantaneous.

The gibes of the Blackbird, and Chantecler's trick of turning the flower pot over him, so that, for his sins, he can see nothing but the sky, bring the act to a whimsical close.

The third act is the Guinea Hen's fashionable crush. The Magpie, in butler's black and white, announces the amazingly variegated fowls, among them foreigners from all over the world. Much of the conversation, being a satire upon make-believe literary salons, is beyond any child. In fact, it is said that some of the wit missed fire even among the Parisians. But the board of investigation into the Gallidoodle Movement is quite obviously funny, especially when the members illustrate their theories as to methods of crowing.

As for the cock fight, nothing can justify that to any audience; but it is perhaps a little less incongruous if the party is regarded as merely a joke. The unceremonious haste with which the guests depart when the call to food (chick — chick — chick!) is heard from the farmyard makes another whimsical ending, just as the Magpie announces, "The Tortoise!"

Last, the forest act, which opens with the prayer of the small birds to St. Francis, a passage next in beauty to the rhapsody at dawn. Then pours forth the Nightingale's song, which Chantecler generously delights in and which all the wild things of the wood interpret, each in his own way. Chantecler's grief when the bird is brought down by a chance shot is simpler in effect than his despair when he learns that the sun has risen without his clarion call, or his spiritual exaltation when

the Nightingale's crystal note is taken up by another songster. But from that point to the end the story runs clear.

Chantecler starts for home with good old Patou, but having learned to use his wings in the forest is marked by the poacher. The Pheasant flies up to save him, but in her haste falls into a snare. Just then is heard his far off reassuring note, and the curtain falls upon the morning prayer of the little birds.

The French Ideal of Clearness and Lucidity

On the whole, it would be quite as descriptive to say that "Chantecler" is a play for children with some appeal to their elders, as to call it a serious drama with a strong appeal to the child. In other words, the freshest, the most creative, the most dramatic part of the play is for a public made up of all ages. Which is merely another way of saying that the play is French, with the qualities that make French literature unique in all the world. Behind and underneath it is the spirit of La Fontaine and all the indestructible traditions of the beast epic, a living lasting influence, strongly exerted upon old and young. The vitality of these traditions and the breadth of their appeal is based deep in the racial traits of the French people. In no other nation does a certain juvenility so long survive the age of childhood, in no other nation is there that high ideal of clearness and lucidity which gives great thoughts such perfect expression as to need no adapting for youthful minds.

In English and German there is literature for children on the one hand, and for grown-ups on the other, but in neither language would it be quite possible to

do what Rostand has done in "Chantecler." For here is a splendid lyric and dramatic impulse worked out in a fashion that always charms the child — with fresh ingenuity, antic humor, untiring inventiveness, and the utmost brilliancy and picturesqueness. The greatest effects are great even to the child.

"THE PIPER," FOR ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION

By Josephine Preston Peabody

> Take heart! I swear, by all the stars that chime,
> I'll not have things in cages.

In this play, an old legend has been firmly seized and boldly handled, has been imaginatively refreshed and enriched without being distorted, and has been subjected to thorough dramatic transformation in every part. The human nature that inheres in all world famous myths has been used to illustrate certain phases of modern life, and to interpret some of the modern thoughts that breed thought.

The material is the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, familiar in Browning's poem. In the process of recasting for play-making purposes the supernatural element seems to have been banished as far as possible.

In the old story the Piper is a creature of pure fancy, who might have come out of one of Grimm's Tales. In the play he is a strolling gypsy, belonging to a band of mummers which wanders from town to town with a rude Noah's Ark miracle play. This gives him a matter of fact setting among several other mountebanks, one of whom, Michael, the gallant sword swallower, falling in love with the lily maiden Barbara, furnishes a romance as the slight plot develops.

In the original myth the mountain side miraculously

opens to admit the Piper and his troop of children, and then closes upon them forever. In the play they all take refuge in a dim lighted cavern or cellarage beneath the ruined monastery of St. Boniface in the neighboring hills.

In the story a crippled child, falling behind the others, is the only one left in the stricken town. In the play the little lame boy is carried triumphantly upon the Piper's shoulder. And he it is who furnishes a logical motive for the culmination of the plot and the return of the action upon itself. At the climactic point there is a fine scene of spiritual conflict, in which the Piper, strongly wrought upon by the indomitable love and courage of Veronika, the lame child's mother, gives over his vengeful purpose. At daybreak the next morning he restores all the children "in one shower of light." And so the action, prolonged beyond its ancient limits, reaches a fortunate ending, and gives the play the comedic character most appropriate to so unpretending a work.

The restoration of the children brings about also a striking *dénouement*. As the little Jan draws near the town, Veronika lies dying. Anselm, the priest, standing in the doorway, blesses her parting soul. Will the voice of the child revive her? The Piper stretches his arms toward the lighted window of her house with a piercing cry:

> He comes — he comes! Open thine eyes a moment!
> Blow the faint fire within thy heart. He comes!

The casement of the window opens slowly and two white hands reach out. The Piper springs upon a bench by the house and gives the boy into the arms of his mother. It is the tensest moment of the play.

As far then as the scenes upon the stage are concerned (the rats are piped away three days before the first curtain rises) the Piper is not the supernatural apparition of the German legend. But it becomes evident as the drama unfolds in an atmosphere slightly tinged with mystery, that the strange man, as the villagers call him, is something more than an ordinary vagrant player. He worships nature, knows the thousand longings of the earth, hates the sordid money lust that kills all joy of living among the Hamelin guilds, makes passionate protest against "that daily fear they call their faith," loves all wild and innocent creatures, interprets child nature with unerring intuition, shuns walls and hedges as he shuns rats and aldermen, and yearns to teach old and young the life of the woods and the open sky. Thus conceived, a dreamer and an idealist, but not wholly fantastic, he is thrown up large against a background of the commonplace and the everyday.

The advent of the primitive faunlike Piper, all quick sympathy and sparkling wit and gay good humor, into the sleepy German hamlet with its money bag of a heart recalls Ibsen's Stranger, that symbol of the wide ocean and of spiritual freedom, as he appeared in the stifling inland town where drooped and pined the Lady from the Sea.

It always, however, taxes the ingenuity to make an old myth take hold on modern life. In this play no possibility in the none too abundant material has been neglected. The townsfolk of Hamelin (it has passed into a proverb) refused to pay the piper. Here, then, is a suggestion of the strong against the weak, the corporation against the individual. So the drama makes the burgomeister denounce the stroller as a

wastrel and the shadow of a man, accuse him of dallying with the law, deny him legal rights, taunt him with having no writ of agreement, and refuse to fulfill the oath and pay the thousand guilders. At this the Piper retorts in the bitterest speech of the play that he has sworn "to have some justice, all too late, for wretched men, out of these same smug towns, that drive us forth after the show." And in this bitter speech are the most memorable lines of the play:

> Always, always, for the lighted windows
> Of all the world, the Dark outside is nothing.

Then, since the original piper was denounced as a sorcerer, and all credit was given to St. Willibald, on whose day the rats vanished, there is a suggestion of religious intolerance. "'T is the hearts of men you want," cries the Piper to the Christ in the ruined shrine, "no offerings more from men that feed on men, eternal psalms and endless cruelties."

And finally, since the piper in the legend took revenge by beguiling all the children to follow him forever, there is more than a suggestion that the parental relation may be considered to motive the play. It stirs the strange man's wrath and compassion that the children, the brightest of miracles, should be left to grow up in the midst of greed, and cruelty, and lies, and cunning, and fear. So he charms them away and thereby gets the town of Hamelin in his hand. This ties the knot of the simple plot.

Nor should it be overlooked that there is easily a hint of Philistinism — the world against the artist. "'T is time," says the Piper, "that Hamelin reckoned us for men."

The play is popular, for in the final act there

is complete regeneration of all the characters (except the miser and old Ursula) quite after the fashion of "The Third Floor Back." "Why do women always weep when anybody is reformed in the theater?" inquired a reviewer not long ago. It is a fact that they weep and appear to enjoy their tears. So the last scene of "The Piper" is vastly commended. Peter the Cobbler is an altered man; the wife of Hans the Butcher longs for the rats and mice again, if only the children might come with them; Axel the Smith lights candles in daytime because the world is dark; and Hans strikes a note of real pathos when he mourns for the dog that pined and died in the childless town: "O, and Lump — poor Lump! More than a dog could bear!"

The imagination is constantly stimulated. The children disappear at sunset and reappear at dawn in a flood of rosy light. As the action goes forward the organ sounds from the minster, the bell now tolls and now clangs, the Piper sings to the children in the cavern, the dismal chant of the Dies Iræ is followed by the gay lilt "Out of your cage," and the far away piping of the strange man upon the high road is the last sound as the final curtain comes down.

The play is in verse that is admirably poetic. As to whether verse is the best medium of expression for any modern drama, however imaginative — that opens up vistas of discussion. The few long speeches in this play are sufficiently dramatic — that is, they are not so idyllic that the action breaks away from the words. But short speeches abound in every act, and it is a question whether the metrical form should be imposed upon page after page of rapid colloquy. Those who are most familiar with the dramatic poetry of the past

are most sanguine as to the infinite possibilities of dramatic prose in the future.

But it must be admitted that the style of "The Piper" is so attractive that to the reader at least it is one of the greatest charms of the play.

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